

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1890.

THE HOUSE OF HALLIWELL.

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CHAPTER XX.

THE CLERGYMAN'S HOME.

A NUMBER of clergy were pouring out of the town of Chelsbro', for the Archdeacon had that day held a visitation in its cathedral. Some who were not pressed for time or funds had proceeded from the cathedral to one or other of the hotels to take up their quarters for the night, but by far the larger portion turned their way to their country homes. We must notice one, who set off to walk. He was of middle height and slender frame, with a look, not altogether of ill-health about him, but as if he had none too much superfluous strength. A walk of nine miles was before him, and the cold evening was drawing on. He glanced up at the skies dubiously. They threatened rain, and he was not well protected from it, if it came, for he was only in his black clothes and white neckcloth. He had a great coat at home, but it was shabby: the seams were white, and there was a piece let in at one of the elbows, and it was darned under the arms, so he had not dared to put it on that morning when he was going to mix with his brother clergy.

And now that Chelsbro' was left behind and he was on the lonely road, where he was likely to meet few, if any, observers, he drew off his black gloves, and, diving into a pocket of his coat, pulled out some bread-and-butter, wrapped in a piece of paper. He proceeded to eat it with the air of a man whose appetite is dainty or has passed. His had, for he had fasted since the morning; but he knew that to keep up his strength at all he must eat, and, failing good food, he must eat plain. But the butter was salt and made him thirsty, and he felt giddy with his long confinement in the cold cathedral, and his limbs shrank from the walk before him.

"This will never do," he murmured, looking at his small stock of money, which proved to be eighteenpence. "I wonder if I could afford a glass of ale? To do so, I must change the sixpence."

He turned with a sigh, for sixpences with him were not to be changed lightly, into a public-house which stood on the roadside. The landlady came forward from the bar.

"A glass of ale, if you please, Mrs. Finch, to fortify me for my walk."

"With pleasure, sir. Please step into the parlour. We have just got in some famous double stout; perhaps you would prefer a glass of that?"

The clergyman hesitated. He would have preferred the stout: it was a luxury he did not often taste; but he feared the price might be more than the ale. He could not for shame ask: the blush mantled in his pale cheek at the thought. So he said he would take ale, and the landlady brought it, and stood by gossiping while he drank it.

"You have got a smart walk afore you, sir," she remarked, as he prepared to depart; "and I am afeared it will rain. You don't look over strong to face it; not as hearty, sir, as when you was last by here, in the summer."

"I must put my best foot foremost."

"We shall soon be a-going to tea, sir, if you'd wait—if I might make so bold as offer to send you a cup in here, with a bit of ham—a beauty we have in cut," resumed the kind-hearted landlady, scanning her visitor's slender form and knowing his slender income.

"Thank you," he interrupted; "you are very kind, but I must not spare the time: I must get on before the rain comes. One of my parishioners is also dangerously ill, and on his account I must not delay. Good-afternoon, Mrs. Finch: once more, thank you kindly."

He walked on, and had gained the fourth milestone when the rain began heavily. Some trees formed a shelter by the roadside, and he halted under them, the bent, twisted trunk of one affording a sort of seat. He removed his hat, and rubbed his forehead with his handkerchief. It was a wide, expansive forehead, but the hair was wearing off the temples, as it often does with those who have a weight of thought or care upon them. The skies looked dark around, as if the rain had set in for the night, and the grey of the evening was coming on. He watched the rain, gloomily enough. The prospect of soaking his new clothes, and so causing them to shrink, was not a cheering one, for it was indeed hidden in the womb of time when he might be able to provide himself with another suit. But there was a darker fear still. Last winter, and the winter before, and for several winters previous to that, a suspicion of rheumatism had flown about him, and Jessup the doctor had warned him, not a week ago, that a good wetting might fix it on him. He could not fail being wet to the skin, if he walked five miles in that rain.

Just then the sound of wheels was heard, on the Chelsbro' side, and the clergyman looked eagerly in the direction. Should it be any farmer in his gig who knew him, or a parishioner, they would give him a lift.

It was neither farmer nor parishioner. It was the luxurious carriage of the Reverend Mr. Cockburn, his fellow-labourer at Chelson. He was being driven home from the visitation. He happened to be looking from the right-hand window as he passed—a stout, red-faced man, but he did not stop the carriage, or offer the vacant seat at his side. “He may not have seen me,” murmured the poor clergyman to himself, as he gazed wistfully after the wheels of the fast-retreating chariot. “Though I did think, until to-day, that he would have invited me to go and return with him.”

It sped out of sight, and he had nothing to do but watch the rain again. His thoughts reverted to the contrast in his position with that of the rich man who had driven by. Not always could he prevent their reverting to it. It was almost a case of Dives and Lazarus: The Reverend Mr. Cockburn was the rector of St. Paul’s, one of the two churches at Chelson. The living was worth fourteen hundred a-year, and he had also a private fortune. His table was luxurious, his servants were many, he had carriages and saddle-horses, he went out every summer for three months—it was necessary for his health, he represented to the Bishop of Chelsbro’, and for that of Mrs. Cockburn—but when he was at home he took no trouble with his parish, all the hard work in it being turned over to his curate. *He*, the Reverend Alfred Halliwell, with his delicate wife and his seven children, could find but a bare allowance of clothes and food, for St. Stephen’s living, of which he was the incumbent, was not worth one hundred and fifty pounds, all told. He was a more eloquent man in the pulpit than he who had driven past, was more learned in theology, had taken higher honours at the university; he was more active in the parish labours than that gentleman and his curate put together; yet he could scarcely live, whilst Mr. Cockburn—“I am getting into this dissatisfied train of thought again,” he meekly uttered. “Lord, keep me from it!”

There seemed to be no probability of the rain leaving off. Of course he could not remain under the trees all night, so he rose and walked on in it. Before he reached Chelson he was thoroughly wetted, and glad enough he was to see the lights of the town. It was dark then; and as he passed by the railings of a large house at the town entrance, the glare of light from the windows of its reception-rooms struck upon his eyes. Fires were blazing in both: the blinds being drawn down in one, but in the other he saw the cloth laid for dinner, and the rich wine in the decanters was glittering in the fire-light. Involuntarily he halted to contemplate the picture of luxury and comfort, but at that moment the clocks rang out seven, and he hastened on. It was the residence of Mr. Cockburn.

A few minutes more brought him to the door of his own home, a newly-erected, small red-brick house. He had been obliged to remove from the vicarage, for the damp there had threatened to lay him up for life. His wife never had her health; his children were

continually ailing; and at length Mr. Jessup said if they wished to live, they must leave the vicarage. So he took this house near, which reduced his scanty income by two-and-twenty pounds.

He knocked at the door, and a troop of eager feet ran to it. His second and third children were girls of nine and ten: they wore soiled merino frocks and ragged pinafores. "Oh, papa!" exclaimed Emma, "how wet you are!"

He laid his hand fondly on as many heads as came within its reach, and went into the parlour. His wife was lying on the sofa, and the fire had gone out.

"Why, Mabel! No fire! I am drenched and shivering."

She rose up, pressing her temples. "You naughty children! How could you let the fire out? Why did you not look to it? Oh, Alfred, I have had such a day with these boys! It is always the same. The moment you are gone, they turn the house out of its windows with uproar. I ceased to speak to them at last, and lay down with a pillow over my ears. My head is splitting!"

"Have you any tea?" inquired Mr. Halliwell, too familiar with these complaints to take much notice of them.

"I'm sure I don't know whether Betty kept the tea-pot. Annie, go and see."

"Papa," cried George, the eldest, a high-spirited boy of eleven, running in, "Betty says she has some warm dry things for you, for she guessed you would be wet. And she says you had better change them by the kitchen fire, and she'll put the young ones to bed the while."

He went shivering into the kitchen, thankful that there was a fire somewhere and someone to think of him. Betty, the prop and stay of the domestic house, was little altered, except in age, and her hair was more grey and untidy than ever. At the time of the Vicar's marriage, she had been discharged for a more stylish servant; but when things grew hard with them, they were glad to take on old Betty and her worth again. Younger servants liked to dress finely and were perpetually wanting their wages, which could not always conveniently be paid. Betty never asked for hers; and, let her fare as hard as she would, never complained of the food. She had her faults: does anyone know a servant without them? Her chief one was a crabbed temper; Mrs. Halliwell called it "cross-grained." However, Betty was never cross-grained with her master: she held him in too high reverence.

"Why, master," she exclaimed, "if you are not dripping wet! Couldn't you borrow no umbrella, nor coat, nor nothing? Do pray make haste, and get the things off."

"Papa," cried a sturdy young fellow, who had sat himself down on the warm bricks before the kitchen fire, "do you know they have been to say ——"

"Now, Master Tom, hold your tongue," interposed Betty, sharply.

"Kiss your papa, and say good-night, and I'll take you and some of the rest to bed. Sir, don't lose no time, for I know you must be a-catching cold."

"Good-night, Thomas," he said, stooping to kiss the child. "Stay: have you said your prayers?"

"Oh, I'll hear him his prayers," answered Betty, in tones that savoured somewhat of irreverence. "You get them things off, sir."

Betty shut the door, and took Tom and three more upstairs to bed. She was not long over it: there was no time to be long over anything in that house. When she returned, the Vicar had put on the warm clothes, and was arranging the wet ones.

"They have let the fire out in the parlour," she began. "I never did see such a house as this. If I don't have my eye over everything, it goes wrong. I took in a fresh box of coal, and told 'em to be sure and keep up a good fire for you: and missis lies down, and the others gets playing, and of course out it goes. Such a noise as there have been all day! enough to drive one crazy. Missis don't keep 'em in order one bit, and if I goes to do it, she's angry with me. Master, you'll have your tea by the fire here, won't you?"

"Is there any tea?" was the reply.

"Why, sir! and the teapot on the trivet, there, a-staring you in the face! I made it after they had done theirs, so it have been a-stewing long enough. Did you think, sir, I had put it there empty, with nothing in it?"

He had not thought about it. His outer eyes had no doubt seen the teapot, standing above the fire, but his mind was absent, and he could not have told whether it was a teapot or a saucepan, or, indeed, whether it was anything at all.

"I'll see to them, master," cried Betty, whisking the wet clothes out of his hand; "you can't do no good with them." She then drew a small round table close to the fire, put a cup and saucer on it, with a little bit of cold steak and some bread, and poured out the tea.

"Betty! that was what went out for your dinner," exclaimed Mrs. Halliwell, who had come into the kitchen, and sat down by her husband. "You must have eaten nothing."

"I ate enough," crossly responded Betty, who had an angry aversion to being reminded of her own acts of kindness. "Meat don't agree with me, and I have said so twenty times; I prefers potatoes. I wish it had been more for master: he must want it bad enough, after his walk."

"I trust you have not taken cold, Alfred," said Mrs. Halliwell, in a concerned tone. "Oh—did Betty tell you Stokes's servant came down just before you returned? He was worse, and had asked for the Sacrament."

Up started Mr. Halliwell. "I'll go at once," he said; "why did you not tell me?"

"Now, ma'am!" remonstrated Betty, "as if you could not have

let him drink his tea in peace! I warned the children not to say anything till their papa was dry and comfortable; and they didn't, only Tom, and I stopped him. Sit still, sir, and finish your morsel of meat. Old Stokes ain't a-going off this minute; he ain't in such a mortal hurry as all that. You have plenty of time."

He thought not. He was ever most anxious to fulfil his duties, especially towards the poor and the sick; few clergymen had a deeper sense of their great responsibility in the sight of God. He swallowed the meat standing, gulped down the scalding tea, put on his old great coat, and started off into the wet again.

The reader may glean that the Reverend Alfred Halliwell's life was cast in a sea of perplexity, and so his sister Hester found it when she went to stay a week with them about this time. She had not been to Chelson since that first visit, twelve years ago, and had not seen Mabel since her marriage. All she could do, at first, was to look at her, for she had never seen so great an alteration in anyone. Instead of two-and-thirty, she looked two-and-forty; and her countenance wore a sad, unresisting expression, as if she could lie down under troubles, but never battle with them.

"It is the hard life I live," she said, in answer to a remark of Hester's; "the constant anxiety, the worry and trouble of the children. Ah, Miss Halliwell! do you remember begging me to consider the future well before I hastened to marry upon so small an income? You told me that the daily crosses and privations, inseparable from a home of poverty, pressed more heavily upon the wife than the husband."

"I do remember it, Mabel."

"If I had only listened to you! But mamma was most to blame. She must have known how difficult it was to exist upon such a living as Alfred's. I think they were all mad in those days."

"Who?" asked Hester.

"The girls of Chelson and their mothers. From the moment Alfred was appointed here, they began to hunt him down, as dogs hunt a hare. Mamma kept me in the background because she wanted my elder sisters to marry first; but I was led away by example and the popular mania, contrived meetings with the new clergyman for myself, and he chose me. Oh! that it had been any of them, instead of me! Not that I regret it, except in a pecuniary light. Alfred has been an excellent husband to me, one in ten thousand. But this wearing, hopeless poverty is enough to turn my brain."

"Mabel, I do think you might have managed a little better."

"I know I was a bad manager at first, but the best management will not stave off sickness, and it is sickness which has so pulled us down. The vicarage was such a place to live in! You saw nothing of it: you were only there in the summer months: but in winter the damp positively ran down the walls. How the children were reared

in it, I don't know; but I believe another winter in it would have done for Alfred. Once we were all down, except Alfred and Betty and one of the boys, with an infectious fever. I cannot tell the money we owe Mr. Jessup."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Hester.

"It must be a great deal. He has never sent in his bill. I will say that everyone has been most considerate to us. Alfred has given him small sums off it from time to time, as he could afford. But with so many children to clothe and feed, what can be spared out of two pounds a-week?"

"You have more than that, Mabel."

"Very little, I can assure you. In the first year or two of our marriage we got into debt; and yet I strove to be contriving and economical. But I suppose I had not the knack of it; I was so inexperienced; and we began life more as I had been accustomed to live at my mother's. People were free enough to blame us, I heard; but I declare that we had no ill intention: it seemed that the more we strove to save, the deeper into debt we fell. My illnesses were expensive, and they came on so rapidly; and I had the luck at those times of having a selfish nurse and extravagant servant, who managed the housekeeping between them, and pretty bills came in! Then we had bought some furniture on our marriage, and that debt embarrassed us. So Alfred came to the resolution of borrowing a few hundreds ——"

"It was the worst resolution he could have come to," interrupted Hester.

"Well, he did it. But we believed that at papa's death we should be able to pay off everything, and be beforehand with the world. But when poor papa did die, we found there was nothing: mamma, even, was left badly off. So, ever since, we have been struggling to pay off this money: a little one year and a little another, besides the interest. Oh, Hester, I am weary of life! The same cares, the same pinchings, from year's end to year's end. Matilda has never forgiven me for marrying Alfred; for she counted on having him herself; but she is much better off than I am—she is out as nursery governess, and gets thirty pounds a-year. Girls are so eager to be married; but they would be less so if they could take a peep into the mirror of the future. 'Marry in haste, and repent at leisure.'"

The children now began to come into the room. Hester had seen the elder ones the previous night, but the rest had gone to bed when she arrived.

"What is the matter with this one?" she hastily exclaimed, as a sickly-looking little thing limped in behind the rest.

"That is David," said Mrs. Halliwell. "We fear he was thrown down; for, when about two years old, he suddenly grew lame, and then abscesses formed. He is never without them. But his health does not seem to suffer: and he has a great appetite."

The child looked up at Hester, with his wan face and his dreamy brown eyes, betraying so much mind. He gave a faint cry when she took him on her knee.

"Do I hurt you, my little boy?"

"It always hurts me," he answered. "Not much."

"Now, children," said their mamma, "run into the kitchen. You are to have your breakfast there this morning. Sam, don't look so gloomy: Betty has some treacle."

"Oh," shouted Sam, "that's famous!" And he rushed off, followed by the others. Hester kept David on her knee.

"Let him go with the rest, Hester," said Mrs. Halliwell. "If he remains here he will be wanting the eggs. Betty is boiling three for us."

"Oh, Mabel! if he does!" she involuntarily exclaimed. "How can you begrudge an egg to this sickly child?"

Mabel looked at her sister-in-law till the tears stood in her eyes. "Begrudge it! I would *sell* myself to procure proper food for my children, but if it cannot be procured, what am I to do? We had these eggs in, because you were coming, and we could not put one on the table for you, and go without ourselves; it would make our poverty too conspicuous. You see you are making me betray the secrets of our prison-house," she added, with a bad attempt at merriment.

"I really beg your pardon, Mabel. I spoke without reflection."

"You only spoke as others would have spoken—all who possess not my bitter experience. It is a shame," resumed Mrs. Halliwell, in tones of deep indignation, "that the Church of England should pay her ministers so badly! Its glaring contrasts are enough to sicken one of religion, as pertaining to the Establishment. Who can wonder that we have so many Dissenters? Look no further than this town: the one church giving its minister fourteen hundred a-year, the other only one hundred and fifty: and the worst paid has the most to do; double, nearly, to the other. Why should not these livings be rendered more equal?"

"I suppose it could not be done, under the present system," said Hester.

"Then the system should be changed," returned Mrs. Halliwell. "It is a crying sin, Hester, that a gentleman who has dedicated his life to the service of the Church should be paid less than a common mechanic. Alfred makes me wild, because he takes things so patiently. I know he feels them, but he never complains or murmurs; and when I break out, which I can't help doing, he goes on, in his mild, stupid, uncomplaining way, about *bearing* one's cross in patient silence. I can't, and I don't try to."

"Where is he?" inquired Hester, thinking it might be as well, just then, not to argue the point. "Not up yet?"

"Don't you know? He is at church, reading prayers. That is the reason we are waiting breakfast. Nothing would satisfy some

of the people but they must have a daily service at eight ; so the two churches take it alternately, two months each, and Alfred's turn is on at present. He is worked nearly off his legs. This is a straggling parish, with many poor, and always some sick. Then there are the schools to attend to, and the different charity clubs and meetings, and the service on the saints' days ; and, if you please, the church has now to be opened twice a week, from eleven till twelve, and Alfred has to stick himself there, in case any baptisms or churchings come in. A parcel of rubbish !”

Hester could not help laughing, Mrs. Halliwell brought out the last sentence with such intense indignation.

“Well, I have cause to say it,” she went on. “If they work Alfred so much, they ought to pay him better. He had two pupils who were reading with him, and their pay helped him a great deal ; but when they put on all these new-fashioned duties, he was compelled to give them up. It *is* a shame.”

Just then Mr. Halliwell returned, and Betty entered with the coffee-pot, and the three eggs. She then went round to take up David. He was unwilling to go, and clung to Hester.

“Ah, that's because he has seen the eggs here,” cried Mrs. Halliwell.

“I have cooked him one,” interposed Betty. “I talked to old Knight at the shop last night, till he gave me one into the shilling's worth, so I have boiled it for him. Missis have got her number all the same, I thought, and it will do Davy no harm. Come along, Master Davy.”

It was Wednesday, Mr. Halliwell's day for going to the church, and he left at eleven o'clock. After that, Mrs. Halliwell came down with her things on. Little David had gone to Hester again, and she had him on her knee.

“I am obliged to go out on some business,” she said. “I am sorry to leave you.”

“Oh, I shall amuse myself very well, talking to Davy. Where are the children ?”

“Their papa has set them to their lessons. Their education gets on very badly, Alfred is obliged to be out so much. If you hear them making a noise, just go and give it them, please. They are in the next room. Betty has the young one with her.”

Mrs. Halliwell departed, and Hester and Davy sat making acquaintance with each other, till Betty went into the room with a full box of coal. She stumbled over a stool that stood in the way, and several lumps rolled on to the worn-out old carpet.

“Now then ! bother the stool ! Them children's always a-leaving something in the way. Our eyes don't get no younger, ma'am, nor we neither.”

“No, that we don't, Betty. But you seem to be as active and well as ever.”

"There's no chance to be otherwise here. Sometimes I threatens to leave it, but that's when I'm cross."

"Where have you left the little one, Betty?"

"Oh, I've stuck him up to the kitchen table, and tied him in a chair, with a tin baking-dish afore him, and a old iron spoon. That's what I always does with him when I'm busy; and he knocks away there for an hour and thinks it's music. How do you think master's looking, ma'am?"

"Pretty well, Betty. He was never over-strong to appearance. I think your mistress looks extremely ill."

"Missis has a deal to do, and she don't get good things enough to keep up her strength. Do you know where she's gone now?"

"No."

"She is gone out to give a music lesson. She has took to teaching the pianor."

"Teaching the piano!" uttered Hester.

"I don't know as I ought to have told," proceeded Betty, "for missis ain't fond of having it spoke of. Not that she cares, herself, but them Zinks gives themselves such airs. When they first heered of it, they came here, and made such an uproar as never was. Old Mother Zink—Ma'am," broke off Betty, "I hope you will excuse me, but I can't abide that old lady. She was a-pushing all her daughters at the head of master, in those old times, and she got her will and snapped him up for one of 'em, and now she comes here, a-turning up her nose, and says he doesn't pervide her daughter with things suitable to her station! Well, when things was at a low ebb with us, last autumn, missis pockets her pride, and begins to teach the pianor—which she has a great talent for music, folks say—and I think that little 'un, Archie, will have it too, if it goes by noise: hark at the rattle he's a-making."

Hester listened, and laughed.

"Well, ma'am, Mrs. Zink and Miss Fanny goes on at her as if it was a crime. But missis is wiser than to give in to 'em: the money's too useful. She has six pupils, and they pays her a pound a quarter apiece, which makes four-and-twenty pound in the year. If it hadn't been for that, ma'am, I don't think they could have kept me on this winter. Though I stops for a'most nothing: just a pair of shoes now and then, for I can't go barefoot."

"Then your mistress does do something, Betty, to aid matters."

"She does her share, what with one thing and another; she ain't idle. There's the making new things for the children, when they gets any; and the patching of the old, which never fails, for one must turn 'em out decent to church on a Sunday, a little like gentlefolk's children; and the ironing the fine things, which is above my rough hands; and the pies, which is above 'em too; and the giving these pianor lessons; and the nursing Davy and little Archie, who both cries to be took up, and I have not always got the time; besides her

visits round the parish. What with it all, missis don't sit upon a bed of lavender, with folded hands, and do nothing but enjoy the smell. My heart!" added Betty, in a different tone, "if here ain't Mrs. Zink!"

She went away to open the door, and Mrs. Zink entered with her daughter Fanny. Both were thinner, and Mrs. Zink had taken to wearing false hair, but otherwise they were little altered.

"Mrs. Halliwell has just stepped out," said Hester, when they had sat down.

"Ah!" grunted Mrs. Zink, "she has turned herself into a professional. What do you think of her so disgracing her family? I never heard of such a lowering proceeding for a clergyman's wife."

"Money is so much wanted here," rejoined Hester.

"You need not tell me that," retorted Mrs. Zink; "you don't know it as well as I do. I should just think money is wanted."

"What a lesson this house ought to be to us against getting married!" ejaculated Fanny Zink, lifting her eyes and hands.

"Yes," answered Hester, "unless we see our future more clearly before us than Alfred and Mabel did. I don't wonder at Mrs. Halliwell's giving music lessons. She does it from a praiseworthy motive."

"I don't care about the motive," wrathfully interrupted Mrs. Zink. "She ought to know better. If it were Fanny, now, who gave a little private instruction, it might be excused. Young—that is, unmarried—ladies often do such things for the sake of pocket-money. But Mabel is a clergyman's wife, and bound to keep up her dignity. As to her husband's permitting it, I cannot find words to express my indignation. He deserves to be tarred and feathered, as they serve the missionaries in those heathen settlements."

"Here he comes," remarked Hester, seeing her brother's approach from the window.

"Then, Fanny, we will go," said Mrs. Zink, rising hastily. "I don't care to come across him, Miss Halliwell, when my temper's up. One gets no satisfaction, reproaching him; and it puts me out of sorts for the rest of the day. Let me reproach him as I will, he keeps on that provoking meekness—wanting to reason, instead of quarrel. If I struck him, I expect it would be all the same. I never saw such an insensible man."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Zink, you are mistaken," replied Hester. "Mr. Halliwell is not insensible."

"Then he carries his 'Christian feeling,' as some folk call it, very far. Into affectation, and nothing less. You must come and drink tea with us one of these first afternoons, my dear."

"Thank you. If I have time. I shall not be here long."

"Ah! one has nothing but trouble in this world. There's Amy must come home now, for she has no other left. Good-day, my dear."

Mr. Halliwell came in, shivering and looking blue. "It is very cold, Hester," he remarked, as he leaned over the fire. "And the church felt so damp to-day."

"Had you anything to do? Any christenings or churchings?"

"No. I generally stop there the hour for nothing. The poor like to choose Sunday: it is their leisure day; and other people always give me notice."

"How is it, Alfred, you have three full services on the Sunday now? as I hear you have," she inquired. "You used to hold them only morning and evening."

"Yes; but one cannot please everybody. A few people wanted the evening service changed to the afternoon, but most of the parishioners were against it, and the malcontents appealed to the Bishop of Chelsbro'. He decided that, according to the rubric, it must be held in the afternoon, and he gave me the orders accordingly. But I was unwilling to forego the evening service; I thought I ought not: it is always so fully attended, so I kept it on. In the afternoon we never muster more than forty or fifty; families don't like coming out immediately after their dinner."

"How tired you must be when Sunday night comes!"

"Tolerably exhausted. Sometimes I feel as if I could go to bed and never get up again."

"Alfred, yours is a hard life."

"Do not set me against it," he returned; and his tones were, for the transient moment, so impassioned that, had Mrs. Zink heard it, she never, hereafter, would have accused him of want of feeling. "I know that it must be good for me, or it would not be inflicted: and I know that I am being borne up in it, for, of my own strength, I never could *do* and *go through*. When a repining spirit steals over me, I compare my condition with that of others less fortunate than myself: there are numbers so, even of my own calling. There is a poor curate in a rural parish—Camley, three miles off—a most deserving man. He has only seventy pounds a-year, a wife, a mother, and eight young children, all to be supported out of it: and he is expected, out of this, to give away to the poor, as I have to do. I have seen him on a week-day with scarcely a bit of shoe to his foot. Hester, when I feel inclined to murmur, I think of him, and am thankful."

He was preparing to leave the room to hear the children's lessons—not that many could have been learnt, from the outrageous noise they had kept up—when Betty burst into it, nearly running against him. "Master! master!" she exclaimed, "here's Mr. Cockburn's footman without his hat, and all his hair standing on end. He says his master's took in a fit, and Mrs. Cockburn says will you go up?"

Mr. Halliwell hastened out, and Hester was again alone. At one o'clock Mrs. Halliwell came in.

"They are saying in the town that Mr. Cockburn is dead," she exclaimed. "How fearfully sudden."

"And like enough it is so," added Betty, "for St. Paul's bell is a tolling out."

All doubt was over when the Vicar returned. Mr. Cockburn had been found on the floor of his study in a fit of apoplexy. Remedies failed to arouse him, and in a short time he was quite gone.

"Oh, Hester!" murmured her brother, deeply affected, "I have envied him in life. But better toil on, as I do, than be surprised, thus suddenly, in my ease, and taken before my Maker, perhaps unprepared."

CHAPTER XXI.

A SECRET BARGAIN.

A FEELING arose in Chelson in favour of Mr. Halliwell, that he might have the vacant living; and a petition was got up, unknown to him, praying for it. His own parishioners said they should be grieved to lose him, but would support it for his own sake. After a few days it came to their Vicar's ears. He would not allow himself to hope, or dwell upon the change of prospect, and shook his head at the bare notion of being suddenly exalted to fourteen hundred a-year. "I might grow proud," he said; "I might forget to be humble; though it would be welcome for the sake of educating my children."

Not so said Mabel. She was in high spirits, and lost herself in momentary visions of having already effected the desired change. "The rectory is such a capital house, Hester," she would say; "and, oh, what a blessed relief it will be from our life of labour! Whatever shall we do with old Betty? She would be out of place there. Pension her off?"

"Make her major-domo over the rest," laughed Hester.

It was Mr. Halliwell who buried the deceased rector. The curate of St. Paul's was the Reverend George Dewisson, a young man very unpopular in the parish. He was a brother of that Miss Dewisson who had formerly set her cap so strenuously at Alfred Halliwell. When a suggestion was made that perhaps he, George Dewisson might be the newly-appointed rector, Chelson was up in arms. He was an austere man of uncertain temper, never cordial with anyone and harsh to the poor, a bad reader, and it was well known that he bought his sermons. St. Paul's protested it would not have him; it had had quite enough of him as curate.

"Are you acquainted with the gentleman who has the living in his gift?" inquired Hester of her brother—"this Mr. Burnley."

"Mr. Burnley is only the steward," he replied. "The living is in the gift of the Earl of Seaford."

The Earl of Seaford! Hester was thunderstruck at the answer.

With reference to the living, she had never heard any name mentioned but Mr. Burnley's.

"I had no idea the Seafords possessed property in this part of the country," she said, almost doubting the information.

"The Earl bought it some time ago from Lord Westnor, who ruined himself gambling, and joined his son in cutting off the entail. I should think ill-luck goes with the property," added Mr. Halliwell; "for Lord Seaford, they say, will be obliged to sell it again. His sons have all turned out wild; but Lord Sale the most so. He has drained and nearly ruined his father."

"Is Lord Seaford ever here?"

"He is here now—so I heard yesterday; but he lives chiefly abroad. Too poor, now, to live in England."

Hester Halliwell was not given to wild schemes, but one was coming into her brain then. That she would find her way to Lord Seaford, recall herself to his recollection, and boldly ask him to give the living to her brother: ask for it *in recompense*, if other persuasions failed, for the injury inflicted on her by the Lady Georgina. Aye, in such a cause, she would not mind telling him that.

"Alfred," she said, "do you know what I am thinking of? That I will go to Lord Seaford, and ask him to give you the living."

"Well done, Hester!" returned Mr. Halliwell, the ingenuous colour flushing his pale cheeks at the words. "What presumptuous thing will you do next?"

"If the worst comes to the worst, and I get a refusal, you will only be where you are now. I can urge the wishes of Chelson as a plea for my request."

The following day found Hester at Hawsford, the Earl's seat. She had engaged a fly to take her, for it was six miles off; and she went driving up to the principal entrance. They were some time answering the man's summons, and then the door was unlocked and unbarred.

"Curious they should lock up the house," thought Hester, "if the Earl is here."

A woman appeared, looking like a housekeeper. "I wish to see Lord Seaford," said Hester.

"His lordship is gone, ma'am. He left late last night."

There was a disappointment! All the expense of the fly for nothing!

"But if it is any business, ma'am, his steward, Mr. Burnley, lives in the village close by. My lord leaves most things to him."

As Hester was there, she thought she might as well see the steward, though she could not urge the matter upon him as she would have done on Lord Seaford. Mr. Burnley's house was the only good house in the village, so far as she saw; and she was handed into the office. It was one of two rooms opening into each other, with a separate door to each leading into the passage of the house. It was

the back room that she was shown into ; and Mr. Burnley, a man of gentlemanly manners, went to her from the front one, through the intervening door, which he pushed to but did not close.

He was very polite. Regretted his inability to comply with her request, for he respected much the merits of the Rev. Mr. Halliwell. Lord Seaford had received the petition in his favour most graciously, and would have been delighted to comply with its prayer had the living not been promised.

"Is it really promised?" asked Hester, wistfully.

"I may say it is given," replied Mr. Burnley. "The new rector will be announced to-morrow."

Of course there was no more to be urged, and Hester left the room. Mr. Burnley followed, to attend her to the door, but a young man encountered them in the passage, apparently in a pressing hurry, seized Mr. Burnley by the button-hole, and took him back into the room. So Hester said "Good-day," and went on alone. At that very moment, the street door was pushed open, and she saw old Mr. Dewisson scraping his shoes on the scraper outside, the father of the late Mr. Cockburn's curate. He was a lawyer and electioneering agent in Chelson, seventy years of age, but as active as a boy, with a rosy, clear complexion, and snow-white hair. Hester did not care that he should see her, and go back and tell Chelson that she had been personally soliciting for her brother—and her business he would not fail to guess—so, on the impulse of the moment, she glided in at the open door of the front office, until he should have passed.

She heard him enter and wipe his shoes upon the mat, and she then heard the young man come out of the back office, and leave the house. Mr. Burnley also came out of it, and shook hands with Mr. Dewisson in the passage. "I have been expecting you this hour," he said.

"Better late than never," answered the old lawyer. "I had some business to attend to before I could get away. The Earl left last night, I suppose?"

"Yes. He is ploughing the waves to France by this time, if he could catch the morning's mail-train to Dover. Walk in."

To Hester's great horror—which is as fresh upon her now as it felt then—the door she had just slipped in at was pulled sharply to, of course by Mr. Burnley, and the key turned in it. So she was locked in. What to do she did not know. She looked at the window, and had a momentary thought of getting out of that, but found she should have pitched upon spikes. Next came a wild idea of trying the chimney, but even if she reached the top and the roof, how was she to get down? So she had to remain where she was, trusting to chance, and to someone's unturning the key, and sat shaking behind the door. As to going brazenly into the back office and avowing herself to Mr. Burnley in the face of old Dewisson, she would rather have risked the spikes.

She did not hear what was said at first in the next room, and tried not to hear the rest, but there was no avoiding it; for the voices, lowered in the commencement to the confidential tones of state secrets, were gradually raised.

"How much do you say is to be kept back?" were the first distinct words, in Mr. Dewisson's voice.

"A thousand," answered Mr. Burnley.

"Which will leave my son four hundred a-year. That's less than I suggested. There's nothing very great about that."

"But there is about fourteen hundred. Under any circumstances but these he might whistle for so rich a living. You know, Dewisson, that you have no interest to get him one of half the value. He might starve out his life upon a pittance, as poor Halliwell does. You are aware of the petition that came in?"

"Aware of it! Chelson's full of it. Thinks it's going to succeed. I say, Burnley, though, the Earl's is not a bad life."

"He is sixty-six, and knows something of dissipation still. He may fill his years, three-score-and-ten; he will not go much beyond them. And then your son comes into the full income."

"And then George comes into the full income," slowly repeated Mr. Dewisson. "Well, it is a good day's work for both the Earl and him: each gets his turn served. But I say, Burnley, what will the parish think of George? They'll call him a miser. Holding a living of fourteen hundred a-year, and living up to four of it!"

"Oh—he gives the surplus to the poor, you know."

They both laughed, and Hester thought, by the sound, seemed to be rising. She shook excessively as they came along the passage.

"Burnley," cried Mr. Dewisson, in passing the door, "we must meet to celebrate this: when will you come and dine?"

She did not hear the answer; they had reached the front door then, and the sound of the voices escaped. Mr. Burnley returned, and unlocked the door as he passed and unlatched it. Hester squeezed herself up to nothing, in her terror, and her heart stood still.

He did not go in: she is thankful for it yet: but went on to the back office, and shut himself in. Not another moment waited Hester. She twisted herself into the passage, noiselessly opened the front door, and flew down the street towards the inn where the flyman was baiting his horse, as if a ghost had been after her. Mr. Dewisson and his gig were already at a distance.

Now the reader may be in doubt whether this incident really occurred to Hester Halliwell. *It did*: the conversation has been related word for word; and George Dewisson still holds his rich living.

Hester had leisure to think over what she had been a witness to as she drove back to Chelson; and, to her, the bargain appeared to be a sinful one. When the fly stopped at its destination, Mrs. Halliwell's face, full of joyous hope, appeared above the window-blind,

and the children came dancing out. Her brother looked up from his warm arm-chair when she went in.

"Hester!" cried Mabel, in her hasty way, "you don't speak."

"Perhaps I had better not speak: for I have only bad news to give you."

"Let us know the worst at once," she cried. "We must know it shortly, anyway."

"The Earl has quitted Hawsford. He left last night for France, and the living is given away."

"Given!"

"Yes. I saw the steward."

"To whom?" asked her brother.

"He did not say," was Hester's answer. For not even to him would she breathe a hint of the dishonourable secret she had (so to say) dishonourably heard. "But not to you."

Mabel sank down on a chair, poor thing, and despair, if ever Hester saw it, settled itself on her face. She had buoyed up her hopes unreasonably. "Toil! and trouble! and illness! and heart-burning! and care!" she murmured. "Must it go on with us for ever?"

Her husband's countenance had fallen, and a red spot, the symbol of raised expectancy, shone on his cheek, proving that he *had* hoped for success. For one moment he bowed his head upon his hands; the next, he rose and spoke, his voice calm as usual, and his face pale again:

"It is the will of God, Mabel, that we should still bear our cross. Let us welcome it."

"If such a meek-spirited temper is not enough to try the patience of Job!" impetuously responded Mrs. Halliwell.

The following day the new rector was announced—The Reverend George Dewisson. St. Paul's rebelled, so far as words could go, but there was no remedy, and they had to sit down and put up with him. Amy Zink came to tea that evening, the last of Hester's stay. The old aunt was dead, so Amy had returned to her mother's. Hester looked at her with interest: a meek, gentle-spirited creature, who seemed, as Mabel afterwards expressed it, to have been "kept under."

"Amy," her sister said to her, "it is a great shame old aunt left you nothing."

"She gave me fifty pounds the day before she died," responded Amy. "For mourning, she said. Of course I have not spent it. I made some old do, and I gave the money to mamma."

"To mamma! Then you'll never see it again," cried Mabel. "I should have put it in my pocket. Aunt ought to have left you a sufficient income."

"She said her nephew Braybrook had more claim than I."

"That's nonsense," returned Mabel. "He can't have. You have worn out your best years, bearing with her fractiousness. You don't know how necessary money is."

"I think I do," answered Amy. "Mamma has been asking me, ever since I came home, how I am to be kept."

"And she'll ask you that every day of your life, Amy, so prepare for it. I wish I could afford to have you here, you would be so useful."

It happened that Hester went upstairs in the course of the evening to fetch something wanted for the children. She was looking for it when a timid, humble voice was heard behind her. "If you please, Miss Halliwell, may I speak to you?"

"Is it you, Amy? Yes, of course. What is it?"

"I do not think I ought to remain at home," said Amy, with a very vivid blush. "Mamma says everything is so dear, and—and—I don't like to hear her say it. It does make me feel so uncomfortable."

"Yes?" rejoined Hester.

"I was thinking that perhaps you might want a teacher in your school: or might know of some other school wanting one. I should be so thankful to come to you. Indeed, I would not presume upon Mabel's being related to you, in the way of expecting to sit with you after school hours. I would be quite humble, and be content to be the lowest of all your teachers, and sit by myself without fire—or anything. If you could only try me!"

Hester wondered. Had she been used to "sitting without fire?" "We are not in want of a teacher just now," she answered, in kind tones, "our vacancies are all filled. Are you"—she spoke hesitatingly—"qualified for a teacher?"

"I am a thorough English scholar," returned Amy; "I understand the globes, and am a good arithmetician; but I cannot play on any instrument. Aunt said she knew I should be stupid at it, and she did not let me learn. I can teach everything in sewing, plain work and fancy work, and I could be useful in the kitchen if you wanted me, especially in cooking for the sick. I can draw a little: my aunt let me learn for a year when I was fifteen."

Hester smiled. "You would have patience with young children, I should think?"

"Indeed, yes," replied Amy. "I have much patience naturally, and living with my aunt has given me more, for she was extremely irritable. No one else would stay with her, not a servant; they would not come near her room. I would strive to do my very best, Miss Halliwell. And I would not ask for any salary: not for a year or two, until my clothes begin to wear out. I have a good wardrobe at present."

"I will bear you in remembrance, Amy," was Hester's promise. And she did so.

Hester returned home, and the school duties went on as usual at Halliwell House. It was a flourishing establishment now; at least,

sufficiently so to remove anxiety and obviate the necessity of letting their drawing-room. Not long after this period they were to receive a surprise—no less than a visit from Mrs. Pepper. She arrived at their house with two children: Jessie, an infant, and Thomas, a lad some years older. Of Mrs. Pepper's large family these were all that remained. Several had died older than Thomas, and some between him and his sister. Two servants attended her: a man and a coloured nurse. She was strangely altered! not the slightest trace remained of the young and pretty Jane Halliwell. Hester would look at her by the hour, and be unable to trace a single feature. She was in an extremely precarious state of health, and a conviction stole over Hester that she had only come home to die.

Tom was the romp of the school-room, and was always escaping bounds and rushing into it, to the excessive delight of the young ladies. He was a round-faced, chubby urchin, wonderfully demure before his mamma and aunts, but a very little demon of mischief elsewhere.

"Jane, you ought to have come home years ago," exclaimed Hester to her sister. "It was really wicked of you so to neglect yourself."

"I did so dread the voyage alone, and Major Pepper never could obtain leave. He is a very useful officer."

"You must stay at least two years, now you are here, to get up your strength at all."

"Not two years. I shall limit my stay to half the time. And I shall have much on my hands. First, I must look for a superior, comfortable school for Tom. Then there will be all the visits. You came first, you see, which was natural; and there will be Alfred and Mary, and the Major's relatives. He has so many, and they are so scattered. Some in London, some in Yorkshire, and in other places; all want a visit from me. I think I shall go to Mary next to you. I long to see her. Hers is a very happy marriage, is it not?"

"Very. Dr. Goring is a delightful man, and a fond husband. You and Mary have been fortunate in that respect. Nice children, too, are Mary's."

"And their circumstances are easy?"

"Quite so. Dr. Goring's practice is good, and then Mary has her annuity of three hundred a-year. We wrote you word about it, you know."

"Yes. It was a lucky thing. You and Lucy are doing well too, Hester?"

"Now we are; but, Jane, you don't know what a struggle and anxiety it has been. Alfred is the worst off. I wish something could be done to aid him."

"I wonder whether the Major has no interest with any people who have livings to bestow?" said Mrs. Pepper. "I must talk the matter over with Alfred, and see about it when I get back to India."

Mrs. Pepper, poor lady, never lived to see her brother, or to go back. When her visit terminated at Halliwell House, she went to stay with some of her husband's relatives at Clapham: Mr. Pepper, an old bachelor and banker in the city, and his half-sister, Miss Oldstage. From them she purposed going to Middlebury, to Mrs. Goring's, but alas! she was taken worse at Mr. Pepper's. Her disorder, which was really nothing but weakness, assumed suddenly a more alarming phase; Hester and Lucy hastened to her, and in a few days, before her relatives and friends could believe it, she had sunk into death.

They were sad tidings to write to her husband: they were sad tidings for all. What would be done with her children? was the exclamation of more than one. But about that arose little embarrassment, for means were abundant: the young boy was placed at school, and Miss Oldstage undertook to bring up the infant girl.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WOODEN LEG.

A SERIOUS misfortune fell, about this time, upon Mrs. Copp. Strictly speaking, it was upon her son, but he did not care for it half so much as she did. The Captain—as he had long been—was with his vessel in the Chinese seas, when it was attacked by a piratical junk. A desperate engagement ensued, and the Captain—we must borrow his own words—“licked the devils into shivers.” But alas, though the victory was glorious, poor Captain Copp was wounded in the leg, which was less glorious, for it resulted, later, in its being taken off. He came home, sold his share in the vessel, of which he was part owner, gathered together what other odds and ends of means he was possessed of, the interest of which was sufficient to live upon, and retired from the merchant service. Mrs. Copp spent a whole month in groans and lamentations: it was so heartsickening to see her fine boy, in the very prime of life, viz., forty years, pegging about upon a wooden leg. Of course he would make his home with her; of that she never entertained a doubt; and when her grief subsided, she commenced various preparations and changes accordingly. Captain Copp rendered them futile. He went a long journey; it was to pay a visit to an old ship-comrade at Coastdown. He fell in love with the little fishing village, determined to establish himself there, and took a cottage off-hand. Aunt Copp was violently wrath, and stormed much, and she went storming up to London, where the Captain then was, buying furniture for his new home. She could do nothing with the Captain as to changing his determination, and she went down and stayed with her nieces at Halliwell House. The Captain occasionally made his appearance by the omnibus; and Mrs.

Copp told him to let the furniture-buying alone, and she would see to it. The Captain certainly was displaying all the proverbial wisdom of a sailor in his purchases, securing the most incongruous articles, and ordering them packed and sent off before his mother could catch sight of them, and she looked after him pretty sharply.

"He'll be wanting a servant," said Aunt Copp one day to Hester; "someone who can manage for him. He has no more idea of management than an owl."

"I think I know a young woman who would suit him. She lived with us more than three years, and——"

"Then she won't do," snapped Aunt Copp, who had never recovered her temper since the Captain first took the Coastdown cottage. "I'm not going to leave Sam with a giddy young woman. He must have an old one."

"She is neither young nor giddy, Aunt Copp," replied Hester. "It is several years since she lived with us, and she was not a young girl then. You have heard me speak of her—Sarah. She was with us when that affair happened about Mrs. Nash's handkerchiefs. She left us to be married, but something that Sarah did not like came to light about the man, and she would not have him. She has been in service since, but is out of place now."

"Perhaps she would not leave London to live in a nasty wretched fishing hole that has not ten decent houses in it," grunted Aunt Copp. "No one in their senses would. I wish Sam's other leg had been off before he had gone and found it out."

"I will send and tell her to call here," said Hester. "She is a thoroughly good servant—steady, honest and straightforward. If she has a fault, it is that she is free with her tongue."

"She and Sam will have some tussles, then; for he won't stand that. But that's their look-out."

That same evening Sarah came: a most respectable-looking woman, now getting on for forty. Captain Copp happened to be there, and pronounced that she looked a "likely one."

"What can you do?" demanded Aunt Copp, giving her a keen look.

"Anything that's wanted," answered Sarah.

"Now, mother," interrupted the Captain, "let me have the overhauling of the young woman: she's to serve me, not you. Can you cook a beefsteak, lass?"

"Yes, sir. Broiled, or fried, or in the Dutch-oven afore the fire; just as you may like to have it."

"And swab the decks?"

"If that means scouring rooms—yes, I can," answered Sarah.

"Can you wash out a shirt and iron it?"

"I have done plenty of 'em, sir."

"And sewed on buttons?"

"Many a dozen."

"You'll do!" cried Captain Copp. "What's the figure a month? I'm not rich, mind."

"Do!" screamed Mrs. Copp; "you are out of your senses, Sam. You are not engaging a sailor. A servant's different from an able-bodied. You have asked her nothing. Why, if you go to hire servants after that fashion, you'll get a pretty set about you. Young woman, are you a particularly steady character? If not, you had better confess it; for I could not think of leaving any other with a young man like my son."

"I don't call this gentleman young," returned Sarah. "He looks as if he'd never see fifty again."

Captain Copp really did. What with his weather-beaten countenance, its scars, and his wooden leg, he looked ten years more than his age. They all laughed at Sarah's remark—none more heartily than the Captain himself. Mrs. Copp told her she was mistaken.

"Well," observed Sarah, whom the laughing had not disturbed in the least, "whether I'm with an old one or a young one, I never was unsteady yet, and I'm not a-going to begin now."

"You and your master will be in the house alone; there will be no mistress," said Mrs. Copp, "so you must be up to the management."

"It's all one to me whether there's a mistress, or whether there isn't," repeated Sarah. "I know what my place is, and the work that's necessary in a house, and if I'm hired, I'll undertake to do it."

But Mrs. Copp had a great many more questions to ask, and suggestions to offer; and she then told Sarah to come the next evening for a final answer, and to settle the question of wages, intimating that *she* gave only eight pounds a-year to her servant in the country. The Captain wondered why Sarah could not have her answer then, and when she left he pegged across the room with his wooden leg, followed her, and closed the door after him.

"Hello, lass! hi! young woman! here! Don't steer off so fast."

"Sir?" said Sarah, returning.

"Don't you pay attention to the womenfolk in there. They said there'd be no missus; they'd like to frighten you; there will be one."

"Then I suppose you are going to be married, sir?" said Sarah, who generally spoke out what she thought.

"That's just it, lass."

"Well, it won't matter to me," observed Sarah. "I'd as soon serve two people as one; and sooner, I think, for the sake of more company. We should have been uncommon dull, sir, by our two selves."

"All right," nodded the Captain. "She is not one as will swear at you, I promise that. And, I say" (with a jerk of the head towards the dining-room), "if they want to beat your pay down, let 'em. I'll square it up with you."

The Captain pegged back again, and Sarah departed. She appeared

again the following evening, in pursuance of her agreement. Mrs. Copp had been preparing a long string of lectures, which chiefly turned upon morality of conduct, to the extreme amusement of Lucy Halliwell, who knew Sarah was not one to need it. Hester sat apart, sewing, with Amy Zink, who had long been an efficient and patient teacher at Halliwell House.

"I need not remark, young woman," proceeded Aunt Copp, "how necessary it will be for you to keep yourself select, and to yourself. His place is the parlour, and yours is the kitchen. Sailors are particularly loose in their ideas, and with nobody in the house but you and your master, the neighbours will ——"

"But there will be somebody else," interrupted Sarah, who had no idea that the information volunteered to her by the Captain was to be kept secret. "There is to be a mistress!"

"Where did you hear that?" demanded Mrs. Copp.

"He told me—master, that is to be—when he followed me out of the room last night."

"He meant me," said Mrs. Copp, majestically. "But that will be but for a short time, just to get his house set to rights. My home is in Liverpool."

"Oh, no, not you, ma'am," replied Sarah; "a wife. He is going to marry."

"He did not say that?" cried the astonished Mrs. Copp.

"Yes, he did," answered Sarah. "He told me I was a-going to have a mistress, but I needn't be afeared, for she was not one as would swear at me. So I asked him outright whether he meant that he was a-going to take a wife, and he said yes, he did mean it."

What Aunt Copp's wrath might have brought her to, it is impossible to say, for she fully believed this to be an invention of Sarah's to escape further lecturing; but at that moment Amy Zink threw her hands up to her face, and burst into hysterical sobs.

"What on earth's the matter now?" cried Aunt Copp, turning round.

"Amy," cried Lucy; "Amy! Are you ill?"

Amy sobbed on, emitting also sundry moans and ejaculations; and Hester, after a few moments, seemed to understand. Perhaps she had been more observant than the others; her suspicions had once been half aroused.

"Amy," she said, "compose yourself. Samuel has asked you to be his wife, has he not?"

"O-o-o-h!" groaned Amy. "Don't be angry with him, please! Don't turn me out!"

"Has he asked you?" quickly added Lucy.

"Yes, he has!" returned Amy, sobbing until she choked. "Indeed, Mrs. Copp, I'll do everything for him! I'll serve him every minute of my days. Indeed, Miss Halliwell, Miss Lucy, I never *thought* of such a thing as his choosing me till he had done it,

and then I trembled so I couldn't believe my ears. It was last Sunday afternoon when the servants were out, and you sent me into the kitchen to show him how the new cooking-range acted. Oh! what shall I do?"

Aunt Copp sat down, completely cowed. Never had Sam taken so iniquitous an advantage of her. The settling himself at Coastdown was play compared with this.

When he appeared the next day, she attacked him violently, and asked how he came to do it.

"Well," answered the Captain, equably, "it occurred to me that I might as well splice with somebody before I went down there, and I thought she'd do as well as another. And a sight better than some; for, let me blow off as sharp as I will, she's not one to blow back again."

"Why, she's older than you!"

"Don't know anything about that," answered the Captain, "and don't care. Very like she may be; but she doesn't look as old as me, by one half. Oh, we shall do, mother."

Aunt Copp went back forthwith to Liverpool, in dreadful dudgeon, and Captain Copp fixed the day of his marriage with Amy for a quiet morning at the neighbouring church. The day before the wedding, Miss Oldstage called at Halliwell House with Thomas and Jessie Pepper, Thomas a growing youth, with a round face and a colour. The children were orphans now, Colonel Pepper having died in India the previous year. They were left very well off. Miss Oldstage stayed to dine and take an early tea, and they were about to depart when Captain Copp, who had come in, gave an unceremonious invitation to young Tom Pepper to stop and attend his wedding on the morrow. Tom was immediately wild to do so, and said his Aunt Priscilla and Jessie might go home without him. So it was settled that he should remain for the night.

"What are you to be, Tom?" asked Lucy, when his aunt had left.

"I am to be a soldier," answered Tom. "It is decided."

"What! go into the army?"

Tom nodded his head in glee.

"I am very sorry, then, Tom," said Lucy. "You may get shot."

"Papa did not," answered the lad. "And think of all the engagements he was in, Aunt Lucy; especially those bloody battles of the Punjab. Wasn't Chillianwallah a stunner for slaughter!"

"Miss Oldstage says she has talked herself hoarse, striving to persuade you to be a minister," continued Lucy.

"Do you know why she wants me?" answered young Tom. "There's a fellow always going there when my guardian's out—a thin scarecrow of a Methodist parson—and he's trying to persuade Aunt Priscilla to desert church, and to go to that little round chapel of his, which he calls Jecoliah."

"For shame, Tom!" interrupted Lucy, putting on a grave face, while Captain Copp slapped his leg in ecstasy.

"Aunt Priscilla tells him she shall never turn round from church on a Sunday, but she goes to his chapel sometimes on the week-day prayer meeting evening. She took me and Jessie one evening. My! you should have heard the singing! It gave us both the stomach-ache."

"Tom," interrupted Lucy again, "I will not hear you speak against any religious sect, whatever they may be. It is very wrong: it is like making a joke of religion."

"I don't speak against religion, Aunt Lucy," interrupted the boy, "I know that is wrong, but I shall speak against that Brother Straithorn. He is always worrying Aunt Priscilla to make me a minister—Sparkinson says it's because he'd like to get the training of me. And I don't speak against him because he is a Methodist parson, but because he's an old hypocrite, and I know he is."

"How do you know it?"

"I'm sure of it," logically answered Tom Pepper, "and Gus Sparkinson knows it too. He's a sneak, that's what he is. He comes sneaking to the house when my guardian, Uncle Pepper, is out, but he dare not show his face there when he is at home. I don't like sneaks."

"Nor I, Tom," said the sailor. "Is your uncle kind to you?"

"Very. Rather stiff and particular, but then you know he is old. He was a great many years older than papa. And Aunt Pris is three years younger than papa."

"What brings her name Oldstage?" cried Captain Copp. "I forget all about it. Why isn't it Pepper, if she is their sister?"

"The mother was married twice," explained Lucy. "On her first husband's death, she married a Mr. Oldstage."

"My guardian wants me to go into his bank," continued Tom. "But I can't, for I'd rather be a soldier than anything in the world."

"Stick to it, lad," cried Captain Copp. "My father wanted me to be anything but a sailor, but I couldn't be persuaded. I had a sailor's craft in my head, and you have a soldier's."

"Papa directed, in his will, that I was to be allowed my choice of a profession," added Tom, "so Aunt Priscilla and Brother Straithorn can't do me out of it."

The following morning rose, and the wedding was as quiet as could be. Tom Pepper and Lucy (who put off her deep mourning for the day) went to church with them, and a seafaring friend of the Captain's, named Luttrell. The two Captains when they appeared, both having come down in a coach together, proved to be dressed exactly alike, in blue coats and trousers, crimson waistcoats and sea-green neckerchiefs, tied in a sailor's knot. The coachman had been presented with a bunch of sea-green streamers for his button-hole. The same coach took them to church. Captain Copp (out of some wrong-headed idea of politeness, he having been its hirer) obstinately persisted, both

in going and returning, in putting the four others inside, and mounting himself and his wooden leg on to the box beside the driver, to the timid confusion of Amy and indignation of Lucy, who remonstrated with him in vain. Tom Pepper was for mounting the roof, but Lucy did over-rule that.

So Captain Copp's nuptial knot was tied, and he and his wife Amy left for Coastdown, where Sarah had preceded them.

(To be continued.)



MORNING SONG.

AWAKE, my love—the city lies
All bathed in golden fairy mist;
It was transformed to Paradise,
By magic, when we kissed—
Yet every moment something dies
From the enchanted streets and skies.

Awake! no lark or thrush is here—
But noisy sparrows in your square
Chirp, flout and flutter, peck and peer
About the branches bare;
And careless of the time of year,
Your shrill canary storms the ear.

There are no meadows here, nor dower
Of roses on this young March day;
I cannot gather flower on flower
For you to throw away—
So wear these violets for an hour,
Though brought from market, not from bower.

It's March, there are no roses sweet,
It's London, where no fields are green—
Yet could these make life more complete
For me, my rose, my Queen,
Since you can make the common street
Turn to a garden, when we meet?

And you? What maid by shepherd e'er
Was better loved than I love you?
Awake—and show the day how rare
A flower in London grew.
Of woods and fields and pastures fair
What do you know—what do I care?

E. NESBIT.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

IT was in the days when female authorship was a commodity at as low a value in society as conger-eel in the fish-market. A woman might be beautiful, might be witty, might dip her fair hands as deeply as she pleased into the troubled pool of politics, but she might not meddle with literature in the way of producing literature herself. If she used her pen for anything besides writing letters of twelve pages, she was at once regarded with suspicion by her own sex; she was labelled "adventuress," or "woman of doubtful character," or "eccentric female," while men at once looked upon her with eyes that had a half-pitying, half-contemptuous familiarity in their gaze. Moreover these were the days when a woman, if she wished to be considered a respectable woman, might not stand alone, or do anything to gain her own livelihood unless it were to use her needle. It was just in the middle of these days that Mary Wollstonecraft had the misfortune to be born.

Mr. Wollstonecraft, Mary's father, was most literally and emphatically a rolling stone that gathered no moss. He was always trying his hand at new ways of gaining money, and never succeeding in any. Now it was agriculture, now it was commerce which employed his energies; but be it what it might, he never prospered in the walk of life he entered upon. Hither and thither he wandered from town to country, sometimes dwelling in crowded city alleys, and sometimes in a rural cottage; and hither and thither his wife and numerous family had to follow him. He was, moreover, a rolling stone with a good many sharp angles, such as a very irritable temper, and not strictly temperate habits, and these, in his various rollings, came into not very pleasant or comfortable contact with the inhabitants of his home. As for Mrs. Wollstonecraft, she was a woman not badly furnished as to brains, but she had none of the quiet strength, or depth of religious principle which makes a woman a home queen. She had little influence over either her husband or her children, and besides all, her mental energies were quite sufficiently taxed by the effort of making the scanty means she had stretch elastic-like to meet the household expenses.

It was little wonder that in such a home as this a clever girl like Mary Wollstonecraft grew up without any great reverence for the sanctity of domestic ties. The child was quite intelligent enough soon to notice what the wedded life of her parents was, and instinctively she drew her own conclusions from it. In after days these conclusions, no doubt, had their share in an important degree in shaping her life's story. Mary's religion was only put into her mind as a form; it did not impregnate her character, or permeate the

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deeper springs of her being. She was endowed with many fine qualities by nature, but she never learned to bring them into tune with the Gospel music. As for her general education, it was not a very extensive one in early youth, though her mother seems to have done as much as she could towards it; but as she grew older, the active, inquiring mind of the girl rebelled against the semi-dimness in which she was kept; she insisted on a wider mental cultivation, and after a while obtained it. She got access to many books not generally read by women in those days, and to some that would not be very healthy reading for girls either of that day or of this; her mind was widened by this contact with other and greater spirits, and her intellectual horizon was increased, but the tree of knowledge bore for her a mingled fruit of good and evil.

At eighteen Mary Wollstonecraft rose in entire and complete mutiny against the tyranny of her father and against the wretchedness of the life she led at home, where she was literally starved both bodily and mentally; with a resolute effort she emancipated herself from all parental restraint, and determined to stand entirely alone. Such a step needed no small degree of strength of character and force of will in those days, when girls, in all classes of society, were kept in much tighter leading-strings than they are now. To Mary Wollstonecraft's honour be it said, that though she left her parents' roof, she was never wanting in filial affection; her departure from their house caused no rupture between her and her father and mother, and her earnings, however scanty they might be, were always at their service; when age and sickness overtook them she came to their side. Her father continued throughout his life the same man as he had been at the beginning, but with the exception of insisting on quitting his house, and choosing her own mode of living, Mary was never wanting in a daughter's duty towards him; her love for her brothers and sisters was always strong and faithful, and she never failed to help and befriend any of them whenever it lay in her power.

Mary Wollstonecraft opened a small school, offering to take pupils on comparatively low terms. The young school-mistress, however, found that her self-chosen path was a very up-hill and stony one. Her youth made parents and guardians regard her with mistrust; she had no references to show which would speak for her character and respectability, she had not money enough to fit up her school handsomely, and so to give it an attractive appearance; only a few pupils, therefore, gathered round her, and she could hardly earn sufficient to cover her most necessary expenses. We can take a hasty photograph of her at this period. A tall, girlish figure in a shabby dress; rich auburn hair, that was always somewhat tumbled and disorderly, as though its owner had but little time for occupying herself with the wavy shining coil; a handsome face, with a forehead too high and broad for a Grecian Venus; luminous eyes, in which the lamp of intellect burned brightly; a pretty mouth the red lips of which were

firmer set than the lips of young maidens in their teens used to be, and round the corners of which care had already begun to draw one or two faint lines ; a resolute, bell-shaped chin—it was a face to be admired, but a face to be still more thought of than admired, a face where genius was waking-up, and where passion might be sleeping.

It was a hard struggle with life which Mary Wollstonecraft fought in these early days. With her brilliant young intellect all aglow, and crying out for more congenial work, she had to chain herself to the drudgery of teaching dull children the first rudiments of education ; it was grind, grind, grind, from morning to evening at the mill or knowledge, and with very little to show as the result in the way of improvement among her pupils or pecuniary gain for herself. Even when the school work was over she could not enjoy any mental rest and refreshment in the way of congenial reading, or a little rational amusement, for her whole time had then to be given to minute domestic details, and to the difficult daily problem of how to make one shilling go as far as two.

At this time the difficulties and perplexities of Mary Wollstonecraft's position were increased by the unfortunate circumstances which happened to her sister. Eliza Wollstonecraft, the second daughter, eager to escape from a gloomy, joyless home, where life for a young girl was something worse than stagnation, had made a hasty marriage with a man she did not love. In the days of courtship he had seemed her humble adorer ; she had flattered herself that she should lead an easy life at his side ; but a few months of marriage had shown her that she had made a terrible mistake ; the fond bridegroom had developed into the most exacting and most brutally cruel of masters. Eliza, in whom there seems to have been always a touch of something very like insanity, wrote to Mary, telling her that if she could not be freed from her husband's fetters she should destroy herself. The alarm of the always affectionate sister was at once aroused, and her indignation against Eliza's husband blazed up hotly. She assisted the wife to escape secretly from her husband's house, and kept her concealed from him. Eliza's support and Eliza's troubles were added to the burden Mary had to carry. The difference between husband and wife was afterwards in some measure patched up ; but throughout her life the misfortunes of this sister cast more or less of a shadow upon Mary, whose love and sympathy for her were unwearying ; though Eliza's violent temper and suspicious nature seem often to have made her worthy of neither.

It was at this period that Mary Wollstonecraft formed a close friendship with a brother and sister called George and Fanny Blood. They were people of great intellectual culture, who had become very strongly permeated with the school of opinion which heralded the approach of the French Revolution in Europe, which had in it a large mixture of both gold and dross ; they led Mary to the stream at which they had drunk, and she imbibed largely from it. From

henceforth her religious faith grew misty and wavering, and she began to hold new theories on certain social questions.

George Blood soon drifted into the position of declared lover of Mary Wollstonecraft, but was quickly and summarily rejected. She had, however, the tact to retain him as a friend, and for years kept up a constant and intimate correspondence with him. For Fanny Blood Mary had a very strong and enduring affection, the devotion of which she lived to prove. Fanny was a promised wife; but her lover, whose name was Skeys, treated her in most unchivalrous—nay, almost unkind, fashion. She persisted, nevertheless, in cleaving to him in spite of all his slights, and at length became his bride. The poor girl's married happiness was, however, very short-lived: she went with her husband to Lisbon, where he had some business call, and there her health, undermined doubtless by the ceaseless ferment of anxiety in which she had been kept before marriage by the man she loved, gave way. Mary Wollstonecraft, in the generous devotion of her friendship, gave up her school and hastened out to Lisbon to nurse her; but all her love and care were of no avail: Fanny died soon after she had given birth to a daughter. Mary Wollstonecraft promised the young mother in her last moments never to forsake this child; and throughout her life, in all its trials and vicissitudes, kept nobly her word.

Mary Wollstonecraft found school-keeping such uncongenial, unprofitable work, and that more especially after her absence abroad, that she at length resolved to relinquish it, and to take a situation of governess in a private family. After a little time she managed to obtain such a post as she wanted, and went to Ireland to be governess to the children of Lord and Lady Kingsborough. The salary was large, and Mary, who wanted money for both herself and her family, took the situation chiefly for its sake.

Very soon, however, Mary Wollstonecraft found that her position, though shielded from the smaller worries and cares of her life as a needy schoolmistress, was by no means an enviable one. Lady Kingsborough, and all the noble ladies who were her visitors, were utterly unsympathetic to her; they dressed charmingly and looked bewitching, and flirted and talked fashionable scandal, and ate and drank a good deal, and sent flying hither and thither a certain light artillery of small witticisms, and played with my lady's numerous lap-dogs, who were rather better cared for than my lady's children; but none of these things were at all according to Mary's taste. They did not treat her unkindly, but she felt that she did not belong to either them or their world. She took some interest, it is true, in her pupils, and gained in some degree their affection, and no doubt opened their minds; but on the whole her residence in Ireland was a period of greyness and depression for her.

At length she grew so weary of and disgusted with her life in the Kingsborough family, that she gave up her situation, and returned to

London. There, through the instrumentality of some helpful friends, who knew and appreciated her intellectual power, she obtained an engagement with a leading bookseller of the day to do various kinds of literary work for him. Mary Wollstonecraft had now reached her right department in the world's workshop, and she was happier and freer and brighter than she had ever been before. She glided into society with men of letters such as was very congenial to her, she had just the sort of work she liked, she was entire mistress of her time and herself, she earned sufficient to live comfortably, and to give substantial aid to her relations. She was looked at a little askance by her own sex it is true, for it was an unheard of thing in those days that a respectable woman should take up literature as a profession; but Mary Wollstonecraft cared little for this; she was never particularly fond of female society in general. If truth must be told, she had rather a pride in affecting all the unpleasant peculiarities which in those days were popularly supposed to characterise literary women, such as inky fingers, soiled, torn dresses, dishevelled locks, and what we should now call a slangy tone of conversation; and thus discreet young wives and sober matrons with grown up daughters were very effectually kept aloof from her.

Mary Wollstonecraft soon began to do higher and more original literary work than that of a mere publisher's hack. Her novel, "The Wrongs of Women," made its appearance, and was well received by the public, as were her other books which followed it. The title of her novel, "The Wrongs of Women," sounds a key-note that rings through Mary Wollstonecraft's whole story; she always regarded her sex as misused and oppressed, and was always eager to champion its cause. She never understood how true men and true women should work together in beautiful harmony, each taking their appointed God-given part in the world's music; no doubt these opinions had been produced and fostered in her originally by the wrongs she had seen suffered by her mother, by her sister Eliza, and by Fanny Blood.

The literary work, however, by which Mary Wollstonecraft's name was made most widely famous was her paper contest with Burke regarding the French Revolution. Burke thundered against it, she raised her voice in its favour. Pamphlet after pamphlet followed each other in swift succession on both sides, and when the conflict was over, Mary Wollstonecraft was considered to have done more than hold her own against the intellectual giant.

So intense was Mary Wollstonecraft's interest in and sympathy with the French Revolution, that she went to Paris in order to study its features and development more closely. A nearer inspection showed her that much was dark which had looked bright at a distance when lit by the glamour of her enthusiasm, and she shuddered with disgust and horror in the midst of the Reign of Terror.

One incident of this period of Mary Wollstonecraft's life stands out with graphic distinctness before us. Mary is hurrying back to her lodgings through the streets of Paris in the fast-gathering twilight. Suddenly she becomes aware that she has got entangled in a crowd. There are fierce faces with glaring, pitiless eyes to the right of her, to the left, in front, behind. She looks around, she looks up uneasily, a shiver thrills through her frame; there, close to her, rises the hideous form of the guillotine. An execution is just over, and the ghastly tokens of it are still to be seen on the scaffold.

Most women in such a position would have fled in an agony of terror from the spot; but such was not the course pursued by the lion-hearted Englishwoman. She stands still, and faces the crowd with fiery indignation blazing in her eyes, and her voice rings out like a trumpet on the battle-field as she reproaches these so-called friends of liberty with the wrong done to our common humanity by these barbarous deeds done in freedom's name. It seems to us that she must fall a victim at once to her rash audacity; the guillotine is at hand. What is to hinder the sovereign people from taking immediate vengeance? Instead of that, however, they stand spell-bound by the stern majesty of her form, by her passionate eloquence, by the scathing lightning that flashed from her glance; not a sound is heard, not a hand or foot is stirred; and when she has ended, the throng divides, and she passes silently like an angry divinity through the midst of them and goes her way.

While she was in Paris, Mary Wollstonecraft became intimate with an American called Captain Imlay. He was a man whose best quality was animal courage; in other respects he was a very ordinary mortal indeed; but Mary Wollstonecraft's imagination created him a god, and she fell down and worshipped him. He returned her devoted affection with a certain amount of sensuous passion, and the two became lovers. Imlay preached to Mary the doctrine of free love; she held back a little from it at first, but there was no priest in Paris in those days to perform a holy rite. She was very lonely and unprotected in the midst of that city of blood and terror; marriage in the cases of her mother, of her sister, of her dearest friend had proved a bitter failure, Imlay's power over her was supreme, and she yielded, and the pair lived together unwedded.

Mary loved with all the faithful devotion of a wedded wife, but Imlay's affection was of a very different stamp. For a little while it burned hotly enough, then it cooled, though Mary tried to persuade herself it did not. The birth of her child did not draw him back to her; on the contrary, he sent her to the sea-coast under the pretext that sea air would be good for her, but in reality to free himself from her society. The result was only what might be expected after the evident change of sentiments on the gentleman's side. Mary Wollstonecraft woke one day to the full certainty that Imlay no longer loved her. There was sharp agony for her in this knowledge, but she

was too full of womanly pride to show her suffering. She and Imlay separated, and their lives never crossed each other again.

During the early days of her connection with Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft took a journey to Sweden and the North of Europe. In those days such a journey was regarded as no small event, and the fact that she had undertaken it added to her title of "strong-minded woman." She made a bright, energetic traveller, and her experiences of foreign lands enriched and widened her intelligence.

After her separation from Imlay, we find Mary Wollstonecraft again settled down to literary work in London with her little daughter at her side. Her old friends soon gathered round her, and she lived much the same as she had done before she went to Paris. The communication between London and Paris was then so slow and scanty, that no one exactly knew what her connection with Imlay had been; most people believed that she had been really his wife, and that he had deserted her. Moreover, as has been said, the character of a literary woman was regarded as a very doubtful commodity at that period in England, and the class of persons who would associate with her at all troubled themselves very little about Mary Wollstonecraft's life in the French capital.

The wound made by Imlay's desertion was deep but not incurable. Mary Wollstonecraft's heart was healed by time and work, and then it was that the flower of love bloomed within her for a second time, and bloomed for a very different man from Imlay; that man was William Godwin. On their first meeting, Godwin and Mary, strange to say, mutually expressed a dislike for each other; but their sentiments quickly altered when they were brought into closer contact, and they found that there was an electric wire of powerful sympathy that drew them irresistibly together. Time passed, the attachment grew and deepened, and they felt they could not live apart.

Her old distrust of the marriage state again sprang up within Mary Wollstonecraft, and at first she lived with Godwin as she had done with Imlay, unwedded. When, however, she found that she was again about to become a mother, the thought of her child's future name and fame in England prevailed as nothing else could do, and she and Godwin were legally married.

All the purer and sweeter blossoms of her womanhood now began to bud in Mary Godwin, but they were never to come to perfection; she died after giving birth to a daughter, whom we know and speak of now as Mary Shelley, the poet's wife.

Let Englishwomen of to-day turn from Mary Wollstonecraft's story with a sigh, with a touch of pride, with strong thankfulness that the position of the literary woman of our own time is so far different from what it was when Mary fought her way to fame.

ALICE KING.

THE RESULTS OF A WEEK.

ONE summer's day, the Beddgelert coach was speeding through the beautiful Gwynaut valley on its way to the far-famed inn at Pen-y-gwryd. It bore a heavy load of passengers outside, and of luggage inside, and the horses were old and lean as Rosinante; nevertheless, the progress of the coach was merry and triumphant. As each glorious mountain sprang into view ahead it was greeted by the sound of the horn, and both horn and mountains seemed to inspire the horses. They dashed up the last steep pull to the inn at a gallop, and stopped at the door panting, but proud.

On the threshold stood Mr. and Mrs. Evans, all smiles, like a father and mother waiting to receive their children. Two young, pretty-looking girls alighted and went up to Mrs. Evans. One was tall and fair, with a dignified carriage and an irreproachable costume. The other one was small and dark, with a very vivacious, charming face, and a costume more picturesque than neat. "I am Miss Tompkins," said the tall, fair girl, addressing the beaming landlady, "and this is my cousin, Miss Goring. We wrote to you from Beddgelert for rooms. Have you reserved any for us?"

Mrs. Evans had reserved two bedrooms, and led the girls upstairs to them, wondering rather that two such young girls should be careering over the country without any apparent protector. As they ascended the narrow, old-fashioned stairs, two young men who were about to descend paused on the landing above to let them pass. They looked at the new arrivals with much interest, and slightly raised their caps. In different styles, both were striking-looking men, and Miss Goring at once determined to find out who they were.

"Is the hotel full?" she inquired.

"As full as it can hold, and has been all the season," replied Mrs. Evans.

"Who were those gentlemen who passed us? I think I must have seen one of them before," she asked next, a little mendaciously.

"One is a Mr. James Hogg, from London. The other is Sir Launcelot Llewelyn, a Welsh gentleman with a very large property; and a bit of a bard too, so they say."

"A bard!" exclaimed both girls. "How delightful!"

"The one thing we have been longing for ever since we have been in Wales," went on Miss Goring, clasping her hands ecstatically, "and what a lovely name—Sir Launcelot Llewelyn! Which of them is it? The dark one I expect, is it not?"

"Yes, the dark one," replied Mrs. Evans, absently, at the same time throwing open the door of a rather dark room, which led into a brighter one beyond. The window of the inner room commanded a

grand view of Snowdon, and the girls rushed up to it at once rapturously, quite forgetting Mrs. Evans's existence.

"This is sublime!" exclaimed Miss Tompkins. "See how wild it is all around! We are surrounded by heights and precipices and lakes! And what a dear, old-fashioned hotel. Juliet, this is the end of the world; I should like to live here for ever!"

"So should I, Betty," replied her cousin; "and only to think that at last, after weeks of vain longing, we should have met a bard! By hook or by crook, Betty, we must make this bard's acquaintance. How soon is dinner, Mrs. Evans?" she called out after the retreating landlady.

"The table d'hôte bell will ring in half an hour," replied Mrs. Evans, smiling back at the excited young faces.

"Only half an hour!" exclaimed Juliet. "Betty, we must hurry over our toilettes if we are to be ready in time."

"Let us dine as we are," said Betty, who was inclined to be lazy.

"Never," said Juliet energetically. "We must inspire the Bard. We must have sonnets written about us, and elegies, and odes and all kinds of things, and we should never inspire him in our dusty travelling dresses."

Betty sighed, but Juliet was the ruling spirit, so she gave in and proceeded to make herself beautiful for the Bard. After this, utmost confusion prevailed; bags were thrown open and their contents strewn pell-mell over the floor, the one object being to find and put on fresh things in the shortest possible time. In this they were successful, and they were ready to go downstairs when the bell rang.

"Do I look as if I should inspire?" asked Juliet anxiously as they left the room.

Betty looked at her critically. "Yes, I think you do," she replied. "You could not be written about as a Madonna, or a Goddess, but as a Nymph or an Elf you would do capitally."

Juliet certainly looked exceedingly pretty. She had put on a soft silk dress of a deep coral shade, which was so simply made that it had the effect of hanging in straight folds from her shoulders, and of being only girdled in at the waist. She had lovely dark hair which curled naturally, and in order to look poetical she had allowed it to flow down her shoulders, simply tying it back a little with a coral-coloured ribbon. This style suited her exactly, and made her look inexpressibly youthful and girlish.

"Well, I will be content with that," she said in answer to Betty, "and perhaps you will inspire as a Madonna."

Betty had put on a dress of virgin-blue, and if being tall and fair and placid-looking entitled one to be called Madonna-like, then she was entitled to be called so, though she might not have inspired Raphael. When they reached the dining-room, they paused for a moment and looked about them for places. Every seat was already

taken, save four in a row at the further end of the room. Juliet's quick mind instantly seized the advantages of the situation.

"The Bard and his friend have not come in yet," she whispered, "so if you and I take the two inside seats, the Bard will be obliged to sit by one of us, and his friend by the other. Come, let us do it quickly, Betty."

"We shall be separating the friends," remonstrated Betty, but Juliet paid no heed. She calmly took an inside chair, and pulled Betty's dress until she was obliged to sit down on the second. Then there remained a vacant chair on either side of the pair for the Bard and his friend.

Soup passed over, but they did not appear; fish—Ah! there they came, no longer attired in careless knickerbocker suits, but carefully got up in faultlessly-cut black coats. Juliet's rich colour deepened in her cheeks, and a sudden fit of shyness seized her. She kept her eyes down and a thrill passed over her. Which, oh which of them would the Bard choose to sit by? Apparently the Nymph inspired more than the Madonna, for when Juliet at last looked up, she found the dark man, the Bard, was seating himself by her with a little bow.

She felt overpowered at the honour thus done her; so honoured that she could not even talk to Betty. As for addressing the Bard himself, she felt quite incapable of such presumption.

Dinner went on, but to her great discomfiture the Bard did not address her, and proceeded with his dinner in silence. It was very disappointing. She felt that a bard who did not think her worth talking to, would not be likely to write odes and elegies about her, and began to feel uncomfortable at having separated him from his friend, who was also eating in silence.

At last, after what seemed an endless interval, she ventured, seeing he was very engaged with his dinner, to take a good look at him. It was a striking face, clean-shaven, and with strongly-marked features; Juliet was especially taken with the way in which his dark hair waved off his forehead: she thought there was something Byronic about it, and that it gave him quite a noble look. His eyes were fixed upon his mutton, but presently in some occult manner he seemed to become aware he was being stared at, for he turned and darted a swift glance at his pretty little neighbour with a half-amused smile upon his face. It was evident he was going to speak, and Juliet awaited his first poetical utterance with a nervous thrill of excitement.

"May I trouble you for the pepper?" he said quietly.

Juliet passed him the pepper-box with a keen pang of disappointment. She wished to inspire an epic poem, and behold! after sixteen minutes' propinquity he only thought her worthy of passing the pepper! A minute later Betty wanted the pepper, and Juliet had to ask for it back again. It was all horribly prosaic. A fierce

antipathy to pepper awoke in the girl's breast, and she longed to dash the fiery condiment to the ground. She began to look quite dejected. The Bard stole another look at her. The drooping head and down-cast eyes were very attractive, and he seemed unable to turn his eyes away again.

"Did you come far to-day?" he asked, in a gentle, melodious voice.

Juliet looked up with a little start. There was a ring of sentiment in his voice which had been absent when he asked for the pepper. She answered him brightly, and soon they were engaged in an animated conversation. Juliet tried to turn the conversation on to poetry, so that she might find out something about his works, but he seemed to evade the subject, and once or twice looked quite astonished.

"Do you find the mountains give you much inspiration?" she asked, as two large family-looking plum tarts were placed upon the table.

"To tell you the truth, I do not think they do," was the unexpected reply, "but I find they give me an appetite;" and, as he spoke, he looked at the plum tarts with a bright and appreciative eye. This also was disappointing, but Juliet remembered to have heard that genius was retiring and given to hide its light under a bushel; so, taking fresh heart, she proceeded in her efforts to "pump" the poet.

"Ah! I see," she said, "you like the peaceful and pastoral better than the grand and terrible, so the valleys inspire you most. You are more a Wordsworth than a Shelley."

Her neighbour turned eyes positively dancing with amusement upon her. "I am afraid I am neither a Wordsworth nor a Shelley," he replied. "Are you fond of the poets?"

"Very," replied Juliet, enthusiastically. "I can read poetry all day long—and I think a poet's life is the noblest life possible. He inspires the world."

"Yes," replied her neighbour, speaking more gravely; "a poet's life may be very noble, and poetry, if properly directed, may have very great uses, and inspire the world to many great and noble deeds. Still, I place the man who inspires below the man who works. The man who does noble things is better than the man who sings of them."

"Men have to be taught what is noble before they practise it," said Juliet, who loved an argument; adding, with the dogmatism of eighteen: "The poet is the best, your life is the highest."

"My life is the highest!" repeated her neighbour after her, wonderingly. Then a light seemed to flash upon him. "Do you take me for a poet?" he asked, the amusement dancing back into his eyes.

"I know you are one," replied Juliet smilingly. "Mrs. Evans told me so. Oh! I *should* so like to read your poems! Have you any with you?"

The Poet was silent for a moment, and seemed to be struggling with some internal emotion. At length he spoke.

"To-morrow," he said, "I will show you all I ever composed in my life." Then he suddenly changed the conversation, and began talking of the neighbourhood, which he knew well, whilst Juliet, much flattered by the mark of confidence he had just shown her, hung upon his utterances and saw poetry in his every word. Meanwhile, Betty and her neighbour had also embarked upon an interesting conversation. Strange to say, they too talked of poetry, but the subject this time was started by the gentleman. He was a fair man with dreamy, heavy-lidded blue eyes, a thin, delicate face, and a curly aureole of fair hair. If Betty had not known him to be Mr. James Hogg, of London, she would have thought him both aristocratic and poetic-looking.

"There is no life like the poet's life," he said, enthusiastically, throwing himself back in his chair, and leaving his mutton untasted before him. "The poet can shake the power of kings, and the hearts of men are as playthings in his hands. He can scale the heavens, and fathom the lowest depths of hell."

Betty did not say so, but she thought this last experience must be very unpleasant. "Do you too write poetry?" she asked, with a dim idea in her mind that somewhere or other she had seen poems by a Mr. Hogg.

"I do," replied her companion; "I am now bringing out a little volume which is to be entitled 'Journeying through the Spheres,' and which describes the surprising experiences of a soul on being released from the body. A grand and comprehensive subject; do not you think so?"

"Very," replied Betty, with a slight smile she could not repress. "It is so nice when people get off the beaten track." Then, fearing she had been sarcastic, she added kindly, "I hope your volume will be a success."

"If it is not," replied Mr. Hogg, refusing plum tart rather gloomily, "I can only console myself by that line from Cowper: 'If the world like it not, so much the worse for them.'"

Again Betty felt inclined to laugh, but she restrained herself; for something in the young man's face touched her. He looked so delicate, so very much as if he needed sympathy and care. She longed to get him something very dainty to eat, and to put a warm shawl over his thin shoulders.

After dinner the young men disappeared, but they left a very favourable impression behind them. "I think Sir Launcelot is charming," said Juliet, when they were in their bedroom; "it is an honour to know him, and I mean to cultivate his acquaintance. Did you like Mr. Hogg, Betty?"

"Yes," said Betty, thoughtfully; "I think I may say I did. I feel a kind of motherly interest in him."

"But such a dreadful name," said Juliet. "I really could not be agreeable to a man called Hogg."

"What's in a name?" said Betty, unconsciously becoming poetical herself; and then they both fell asleep.

The next morning broke clear and beautiful, and the girls went down determined to "do something." Their two acquaintances strolled in whilst they were breakfasting, and received such a friendly greeting that they waxed bold and proposed an expedition together to Llanberis. Betty as the elder, and presumably therefore the chaperon, hesitated a little; but Juliet, who did not trouble her head about "les convenances," overruled her.

"I don't quite think papa would like it, they are such strangers to us," remarked Betty, as she reluctantly put on her hat.

"Oh, it's all right," said Juliet, carelessly. "Sir Launcelot is a gentleman; of that there can be no doubt; and Mr. Hogg seems thoroughly respectable."

"Respectable!" exclaimed Betty, more indignantly than the occasion warranted; "of the two, I should say he was the more aristocratic."

Juliet smiled a little as she led the way downstairs. It was a delightful walk to Llanberis, a distance of about six miles through the beautiful pass, giant precipices towering over them on every side.

Juliet walked ahead with the Bard, and they both seemed quite engrossed in each other. They no longer talked poetry; Juliet was content to await the proud moment when she was to be honoured with his confidence. Betty and Mr. Hogg walking behind also seemed extremely happy. The girls felt a little tired when they had come to an end of their walk, and inspected the lakes and waterfall, so they all repaired to the Victoria Inn to get some luncheon and rest. They were ushered into a spacious but empty coffee-room, and the young men ordered luncheon. A slight embarrassment crept over the party, as they awaited their meal in the big, empty room, and even Juliet began to feel they were doing an unconventional thing in thus spending the day with two young men of whom they knew so little.

"Are you making a tour in North Wales?" asked Sir Launcelot, breaking an awkward silence. It was the first personal question he had asked.

"Yes," replied Betty, eagerly, glad to explain the position, "but we have not been alone before, my cousin and I. Papa had to leave us for a week, so he sent us here from Beddgelert, having heard that Mrs. Evans was a kind, friendly woman."

"We must try and make the week pleasant to you, so that you may miss your father as little as possible," replied the Bard with a kind smile, and his little speech made the whole party feel more at ease. Presently he ventured to ask another question.

"Do you two live together?" he asked gently.

Juliet was seated in a chair, and Betty was leaning over the back of it when the question was asked.

"Yes," answered Juliet, "we live together. Betty and uncle are my all, and their home is my home. Everyone else belonging to me is dead."

She leaned her head back against Betty's shoulder as she spoke, and a soft mist came into her dark eyes. The young face looked inexpressibly touching and beautiful with the slight shadow of sorrow over it, and the Bard's eyes took a very tender look as he gazed down upon it.

"And Juliet is everything to us," said Betty quickly; "our home would lose its chief sunshine if we lost her." She passed her arm affectionately round Juliet's neck as she spoke, looking very fair and sweet, and Mr. Hogg looked at her with undisguised admiration.

Luncheon passed over pleasantly, and then they ordered coffee, which they sat a long time over, talking idly. Suddenly the Bard turned to Juliet and said: "Miss Goring, I promised last night to show you all I had ever composed in the way of poetry. I think this is a very fitting moment, and I propose to read to you now my first and last effort."

He drew a little slip of paper from his pocket as he spoke, and looked merrily across the table at Juliet sitting opposite.

Juliet felt disappointed. There was a publicity about this proceeding which took away the pleasant feeling that she had been thought worthy of a bard's confidence. And what a small strip of paper it was! It could not be a Tragedy, or an Idyll, or an Epic poem! It might be a Sonnet, but it must be a most wonderful Sonnet, since alone it had made the Bard's reputation. "I wrote it at the early age of seven," said the Bard, and then in a clear, melodious voice he read the following:—

One day as I was walking with my egshullent Mother
 In the pleasant fields of Sutton,
 I saw disporting one of those woolly creachures
 Which when we eat it we call mutton.
 "Fair maiden," I said to my egshullent Mother,
 "I seek for informashon
 Is it right these woolly creachures should be killed
 To give food to the British Nashon?"
 My egshullent Mother sat down,
 And a tear convulsed her feachures.
 She replied, "We must not mind being eaten,
 If by so doing we can benefit our fellow creachures,"
 I often think of my egshullent Mother
 As I walk in the pleasant fields of Sutton,
 And I long to benefit my fellow-creachures.
 But alas! I am not mutton!
 It is very sad that crewel fate
 Should thus my aspirashons clog,
 But I will try to be very good bacon
 Since I was born —— a Hogg!

Here the Bard ceased reading, and looked across at Juliet, who sat looking quite bewildered, a deep flush spreading over her face. "Then you are not a poet?" she said at last in a tone of the most naïve chagrin.

The author of the verses laughed. "No," he said, "that is an honour I have no claim to, as I have now successfully proved to you. My friend writes poetry"—here he looked at Betty's cavalier—"and very successful poetry; but I am content with a humbler walk of life."

"But I do not quite understand," said poor Juliet, a horrible suspicion creeping into her mind. "Are you not Sir Launcelot?"

"No, you have mistaken me for my friend. This is Sir Launcelot"—here he again indicated Betty's friend—"and I am Mr. James Hogg, as you may infer from my verses. Sir Launcelot is the descendant of a hundred kings; my only claim to distinction is that my father was a good and honest tradesman."

There was a good deal of dignity about the ex-Bard as he thus explained his position, but the dignity was lost upon Juliet. She was both mortified and disappointed, and the triumphant look in Betty's eye made her remember with shame the conversation they had had the evening before in their bedroom. After all, she had been making herself agreeable to a man called Hogg! A man whose father could only be described, at best, as an honest tradesman! That meant that he did not cheat behind the counter, did not sand the sugar, or mix dust with the pepper! What a claim to distinction! Her mortification and disappointment were so clearly expressed in her face that Betty tried to cover the awkwardness of the moment by making a polite speech.

"Your verses are a little crude," she said smilingly, "but I like the sentiment of them. It is true and good."

"Quite so," said the real Sir Launcelot, chiming in eagerly. "I assure you, Miss Tompkins, they give you the key-note of my friend Hogg's character. He spends his life trying to benefit his fellow-creatures —"

"Stop, Launcelot; I decline to be the subject of your eloquence," said Mr. Hogg laughingly. Juliet's manner had not discomposed him in the least, and his ease of manner compelled even her unwilling admiration.

Betty thought it wise to suggest a move after this, so they started homewards, but this time the order of their going was changed. Betty walked ahead with Mr. Hogg, and Juliet followed with Sir Launcelot. But though she had exchanged a sham poet for a real one, Juliet felt neither excitement nor pleasure. Sir Launcelot did his best to reinstate his friend on the pedestal from which he had evidently fallen, but in vain.

"Hogg is a splendid fellow," he said as they walked along. "He works like a galley-slave amongst the poor. I wish you could see his estate in Hampshire. It is quite a happy valley: model cottages,

hospitals, library, concert-room, recreation grounds, museum—all kinds of things to make the people happy."

"But how can he do all this if he is only a tradesman's son?" asked Juliet, who had been brought up in a rural district, and had been picturing a small village shop.

"Oh! his father amassed quite a fortune in his line of business," said the poet, lightly.

"What was his line of business?" asked Juliet, anxiously.

"He was a tailor," replied the baronet, a little unwillingly.

Juliet flushed crimson, and walked on in silence, disturbed to a degree which surprised herself. What if Mr. Hogg's father were a tailor, how could it possibly affect her? And yet it did affect her. She thought of the tailor at home: a mean-looking little man, in a white apron, with big scissors hanging from his waist, and a very fawning manner. So Mr. Hogg, senior, had looked, no doubt! Perhaps the son once wore the apron and scissors, and snipped at the waistcoats and trousers! And she had liked him so much, had thought him so grand, so noble, so poetic! It was like waking from a pleasant dream. Betty looked round at this juncture, and seeing the pair were silent and looked rather dull, she fell back, and the four walked together the rest of the way home. During the course of conversation, it transpired that Mr. Hogg was a clever and accomplished actor.

"He took in his own father once," said Sir Launcelot, laughingly; "rang at the door-bell in disguise, had himself announced as an American his father was expecting, and dined tête-à-tête with him without having his identity discovered. Don't you think that was rather clever, Miss Goring?"

"Perhaps so," said Juliet, unwillingly; "but I do not think anyone could take me in like that."

"Do you think not?" asked Mr. Hogg. He was walking by her side, very close to her, and looking down upon her from his superior height. Juliet looked up, and met the keen glance of his dark eyes. There was a calm assurance about him which annoyed her, she scarcely knew why, and she moved a little away from him as she answered, haughtily:

"I think I should know you, Mr. Hogg, under any circumstances; your father was very easily imposed upon, I should say."

Betty looked at her, wonderingly. She could not understand why Juliet should be so upset by a little mistake which was, after all, of very little consequence. They still had the honour of a bard's acquaintance. But then, Betty regarded the affair with more complacent eyes than Juliet, for, whilst she retained her poet, Juliet had lost hers.

The next day was Sunday, and the two girls came down rather late, in attire which was Sunday-like, and betokened an intention to go to church. The young men came and talked to them as on

the previous morning, but threw out no hint of a wish to accompany them. It is possible that if they had been warmly received they might have done so, but Juliet was so distant in manner that they did not feel encouraged to make any overtures.

"I suppose you are going to the little church at Capel Curig?" said Sir Launcelot.

"Yes," replied Betty. "It is only about four miles there, Mrs. Evans tells us, so it will be a nice walk."

"Let us come home over Moel Siabod, Betty," said Juliet. "It will be more interesting than the road."

"You must not attempt that mountain without a guide," exclaimed Mr. Hogg. "Remember, the country is utterly unknown to you; the sides of Moel Siabod are full of treacherous bogs, and the mists come over the mountains from Snowdon, and may envelop you whilst on the summit without a moment's warning."

"We shall be able to take care of ourselves, I have no doubt," said Juliet, looking exasperatingly pretty, though she tried to be disagreeable. Mr. Hogg accepted the snub, and said no more, but he looked very thoughtful, and rather mischievous as they left the room.

It was a lovely morning; the sunshine was dazzling, the sky cloudless, the air warm, yet breathing of the mountains. The girls walked quickly along the road, which descended gently, leaving first the rocky peaks of the wonderful Glydys, and then the grand slopes of Moel Siabod behind them. Green stretches of grass were all around them, giant mountains reared their heads against the horizon, the lakes of Capel Curig lay shining and blue to their left.

The service in the little church was long; so, when it was over, the girls, feeling hungry, had some luncheon at the Royal Hotel before beginning their climb over Moel Siabod home. They left the hotel by a path indicated to them by the waiter, which led to a bridge over a stream, then following his directions they skirted a slate quarry, kept up along a ridge, and presently came to a grassy slope which ascended steeply to the rocky summit above.

It was a long, tiring climb, and they both began to feel very hot. It was now about two o'clock, and a haze was coming over the mountain tops around them, which, earlier in the day, had been so beautifully clear. At length they reached the rocky crest of the mountain. Some very hard, rough climbing followed, and then they gained the cairn. A glorious view rewarded them: all the great peaks of the Snowdon range were around them, Snowdon itself towering over them all, and far away shone the sea.

"See, Pen-y-gwryd lies down there," said Betty; "it will not take us very long to descend."

"It is a good thing it does not lie in this direction," said Juliet, laughing and pointing to the deep precipice which sheered down on one side from the point on which they were standing.

Betty looked round her apprehensively.

"I should not like to lose myself here in the dark," she said. "Juliet, look what a haze is spreading over the mountains; Snowdon is quite hidden, and it seems to be coming this way."

Juliet looked up startled. "It is not haze, it is mist," she said. "Oh! Betty, do you remember what Mr. Hogg said?"

It was as he had warned them. Without a moment's notice the treacherous mountain mist was upon them, slight at first, but getting denser and denser with frightful rapidity. Really alarmed, the girls hurriedly began to descend, making in a straight line for their hotel, but soon they could not see a yard before them. The mist had increased to a cloud, and veiled everything from their eyes. They stood still, not knowing in what direction to go, and peered at each other's white and frightened faces.

"The bogs," said Juliet in a tragic and most suggestive tone.

Betty shuddered. "The precipice," she said still more tragically, and then they both shuddered.

"I dare not take another step," said Juliet; "let us sit down on this stone, and wait to see if the mist will clear."

They sat down on the cold wet stone, and waited in silent suspense. A long time passed thus. It was bitterly cold, the mist was almost like rain, it soaked through their thin summer clothes, and chilled them to the bone. They bore it as long as they could, but at last the cold grew intolerable; the cruel fog showed no sign of lifting, and in despair they rose, determined at all risks to move on. Better to risk falling down the precipice than to perish slowly of cold.

"We must feel our way with our sticks," said Juliet, with teeth chattering; "but oh! Betty, give me your hand, I am so terrified."

The poor little girl was even more frightened than her companion. She was naturally more timid and imaginative, and realised more vividly the danger of the situation. Very slowly the girls advanced, clinging to each other with one hand, whilst they prodded the ground at their feet with their sticks to make sure of solid footing at every step. They could not tell whether they were descending the mountain side or not. Sometimes the ground seemed to slope downwards, then a great rock would loom upon them out of the mist, and they had to turn aside, and found themselves rising again. They became exhausted, and all hope fled from them. To add to their terrors, it began to get dusk; the day was declining, and soon night would be upon them. They were lost, hopelessly lost!

Suddenly Juliet, who was sobbing as if her heart would break, floundered violently, lost her hold of Betty's hand, and sank up to her knees in a bog. The poor girl screamed frantically, waving her hands above her head in utmost terror.

"Save me," she screamed. "Oh! Betty, don't let me die like this; don't let me sink and be choked in this horrible bog."

Betty leaned forward and tried to reach her, but the soft ground

gave way beneath her feet, and she dared not advance an inch nearer. She, too, lost all self-control, and sent shriek after shriek into the silent fog around them.

"Will no one come?" cried Juliet. "Oh, Betty, I am sinking deeper."

Betty looked wildly around. Was there nowhere any help? Oh! joy! From out the mist came a voice, a man's voice, calling to them, "Where are you?" Help was at hand.

"Here, here," screamed Betty, striving with her eyes to pierce through the mist. Guided by her voice, in another moment their deliverer had reached them. He was a big, powerful man, dressed as a shepherd, with a curly head of auburn hair, and a short curly beard and moustache. He wore a big slouching hat, and was closely followed by a collie. He perceived the situation at a glance.

"Throw yourself forward towards me," he called out authoritatively to Juliet, pushing Betty aside and taking her place.

Juliet obeyed him blindly, and as she did so, the man leaned forward, poising himself on one powerful foot, and stretching out his long arms, caught hold of the sinking girl. One violent long pull, and Juliet felt herself being drawn out of the soft mud, and swung round on to solid ground. She was half-fainting and beside herself with terror. She clung to her deliverer with all the abandonment of a frightened child, clasping his hand in both hers, as though she feared he would leave her. Her hat had fallen off into the bog, and her hair hung in damp tendrils all around her small white face, which would have appealed to the hardest heart in its helpless childish terror.

"Oh, don't let me go again! don't let me go again!" she half-moaned, leaning her head back against the man's broad shoulder. "I shall tumble into that horrible bog again; it will draw me down and choke me!"

In spite of his rough looks, the man evidently had a tender heart, for he took off his coat, and, wrapping it gently round the terrified girl, he lifted her in his arms, where she lay utterly silent and exhausted, only conscious that within them she had at last found safety and protection.

"Now, Brownie, lead the way home," said the shepherd, addressing his dog; and telling Betty to follow closely in his steps, he moved forward, the dog slowly leading them with short barks of excitement. "To Pen-y-gwryd Hotel, please," said Betty; "we are staying there."

"I know," replied the shepherd; "Mrs. Evans sent me after you. She was rare anxious when you did not return at midday. I had to leave the sheep then and there, and I doubt not shall find many gone astray when I get back, but I am right glad I have saved you two poor wandering lambies."

The man's speech was homely, but his voice was full and melodious.

To Juliet, nestling in his arms, the voice of her deliverer sounded the sweetest voice she had ever heard.

It was quite dark when they reached the hotel. A crowd of people were anxiously looking out for them all along the road, and at the door they were received with rapture by Mr. and Mrs. Evans. The shepherd carried Juliet straight into the bar-parlour, placed her on the settle, and then, with a few low words to Mrs. Evans, departed. Then Mrs. Evans turned everyone out but one maid, and with her help took off the girls' muddy and dripping garments, wrapped them in blankets, placed them in easy-chairs close in front of a roaring fire, and then administered to each a strong glass of whisky toddy. It was very nasty, and they soon grew unpleasantly hot, and neither of the girls remembered in the least how they got to bed that night; but Mrs. Evans declared afterwards that the toddy was very weak, and that they were quite sober, and that it had saved their lives in any case; so they tried to believe her.

Betty had quite recovered from her unpleasant adventure by the next morning, but Juliet, who was very excitable, suffered for some days from the shock fright had given her system, and from a sore throat, the result of exposure. She looked so feverish and weak next day, that Betty engaged a private sitting-room, and brought her down to lie on the sofa there. It was rather trying to Juliet to lie in that dull little room all day, with the sunshine blazing out of doors, and everyone going off to enjoy themselves. Betty, too, found it trying, but she would not leave her cousin.

"I wonder our friends have not been to inquire after us," remarked Juliet, in a piqued tone, when their tête-à-tête luncheon was over.

"Well, Juliet, you were not very agreeable to them when we saw them last, so perhaps they are shy of coming. It is not from want of kindness, for I hear both Sir Launcelot and Mr. Hogg went out in search of us last night."

Juliet was silent for a little after this, but she did not look satisfied. Presently she said more cheerfully: "I wonder where that dear shepherd is. Betty, he saved me from a most horrible death; we can never be grateful enough to him; and he was so kind and tender, I felt it all through me. I think we ought to send for him and thank him. We ought to give him a really handsome present. Do send for him, then we can talk to him, and find out what kind of present he would like."

The shepherd was sent for through Mrs. Evans, and sent word he would come and see them at five o'clock. Much pleased, Juliet arranged they would have tea and make him take some with them.

"We must treat him as if he were a gentleman," she observed; "we cannot make too much of him after his noble conduct, and it will put him at his ease, perhaps, to have something to eat and drink."

Betty agreed this would be the least they could do.

At five o'clock punctually the shepherd arrived. Rather to the surprise of the two girls he was neither shy nor embarrassed, but took his tea, as Juliet afterwards observed, "quite like a gentleman." He made an uncommonly good tea, too, and Juliet took it into her head that perhaps he did not often get a good meal, and pressed cake upon him, until he was obliged to state plainly that he could not manage any more. Then they began to talk, and the shepherd acquitted himself in a way that surprised his entertainers. His choice of words was homely, and his accent somewhat countrified, but he seemed to have read an astonishing amount for a man in his position, and at last he fairly electrified them by quoting a long passage from Shakspeare.

A shepherd, clad in rough, dirty clothes, talking with the ease of a gentleman to ladies, and quoting Shakspeare, was indeed an anomaly! Juliet became quite excited, and looked at him with undisguised curiosity and admiration. She noticed that his hands, though large and sunburnt, were beautifully formed, and the nails as well kept as if he had never done a day's work in his life. Unable to restrain her curiosity, she said suddenly:

"Surely you have not always been a shepherd?"

"May I ask why you doubt it, miss?"

"Because," said Juliet rather confusedly, "you seem better born than that—I mean you look and speak as if you ought to occupy a better position. Are you content with your present one?"

"I am content to remain a working man, and to do what has been given me to do. I do not think it matters what a man's position is. It is what he is himself that matters."

"I quite agree with you," said Juliet eagerly, fearing she had wounded him. "If a man is brave, and gentle, and true, as I am sure you are, whatever his birth may have been, he is as much a gentleman as the descendant of a hundred kings."

"Even if he be the son of a tailor?" put in Betty, provokingly.

Juliet turned very red. "Of course," she said, "even if he be the son of a tailor."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said the shepherd gravely, and as he spoke Juliet caught a glance from his dark eyes which bewildered and disconcerted her, she scarcely knew why.

"I am glad to hear you say so," he repeated still more gravely, and then he rose with his hat in his hands as if to go.

"Oh, please stop one moment," said Juliet, blushing to the roots of her hair and feeling very shy. "You know we are deeply indebted to you, my cousin and I; you saved our lives, and we wish to give you a little present, a little remembrance of yesterday, if we only knew what would please you. Or," she added hesitatingly, "would you like some money?"

"I do not care for money, thank you," replied the shepherd,

quietly, "but there is something that would give me great pleasure, only I fear to offend by asking for it."

"You may ask anything you like," said Juliet, gently; "you will not offend us."

"May I come and talk to you again, and hear about London and the big world? It is a great pleasure to me to talk to ladies."

"Certainly," replied Juliet, looking very pleased; "come to tea again to-morrow."

The shepherd bowed and departed, looking very fine and stalwart as he left the room.

"Is he not charming?" asked Juliet rapturously a minute after.

But Betty had suddenly become pettish—a most unusual thing with her—and would not respond. She said shepherds were very well in their way, but that she was not sure it was correct to have them to tea, and she was sure papa would not like it, and *others* had come in search of them besides shepherds, but she supposed, now Juliet had got hold of this new idea of social equality, baronets were beneath her notice! Juliet listened at first in amazement, but presently a light seemed to dawn upon her and she said sweetly:

"Betty, dear, since I cannot go in to dinner, and you will not leave me, and since you think I have been rude, suppose we ask Sir Launcelot and his friend to come and have coffee with us after dinner?"

Betty brightened up instantly, and we presume that on this occasion the fact that it was for coffee, and not for tea, made the invitation correct, for no doubts as to whether papa would like it or not seemed to assail her. A polite note was despatched to the gentlemen, who sent back a reply almost immediately, accepting their kind invitation. At eight o'clock they arrived, and Betty received them with much animation. Juliet tried to be cordial, but she felt too physically weak to exert herself much, and Mr. Hogg's presence, and the keen and frequent glances of his dark eyes made her feel shy. She lay back on her cushions, rather silent, and listened to the gay chatter of the others.

"Our deliverer has been having tea with us," observed Betty presently.

"What is he like?" asked Mr. Hogg.

"Oh! decidedly above the average shepherd," replied Betty. "I should like his clothes to have been a bit cleaner, but he really behaved very nicely."

"I suppose he was very shy," observed Sir Launcelot.

"Not at all," said Betty; "he made an enormous tea, and asked leave to come again."

"Now, Betty, you are not to speak of my dear shepherd in that tone," said Juliet, forgetting her shyness. "He is one of nature's gentlemen, and I feel quite fond of him."

Then she burst into such a panegyric on the absent shepherd

that her three hearers all began to smile. Perceiving this, she cooled down and laughed herself, and they all talked happily together for a little bit. Then Sir Launcelot produced a birthday book of quotations from his own poems, and he and Betty became absorbed in it, leaving Juliet and Mr. Hogg to entertain each other, which they seemed to do extremely well. Every now and then a vision of a mean-looking old man in a white apron snipping at a pair of trousers with long scissors floated before Juliet's eyes and disturbed her a little, but she remembered the shepherd's words and tried to dismiss the vision as unworthy of her.

At ten o'clock Mr. Hogg rose to go. Sir Launcelot objected, he wanted to finish reading the birthday book with Betty, but Mr. Hogg was firm.

"Miss Goring looks very tired," he said, looking down with decided tenderness on the flushed face on the sofa-cushion. "Perhaps we may be permitted to come again to-morrow."

Permission was given, and on this understanding Sir Launcelot consented to go.

The next day Juliet's throat was still sore, so Betty again stayed at home with her. At five o'clock the shepherd came to tea, and Sir Launcelot unexpectedly called and was invited to tea also; scoring thereby, as he observed, over his friend Hogg, who would only get coffee.

He was introduced to the shepherd and the two talked a good deal together, the shepherd again astonishing the girls by his conversation and bearing. He completely fascinated Juliet, and the hour he stayed passed to her like five minutes. Mr. Hogg did not seem in the least jealous when he appeared at coffee, though Sir Launcelot had stolen a march upon him; and they had another very pleasant evening.

The next day, Wednesday, Juliet was still poorly, but she insisted on Betty's going for a walk. Betty went out alone, rather reluctantly, declaring she should return in twenty minutes. Three hours later she returned, accompanied by Sir Launcelot and hoping Juliet had not been dull. Juliet was looking much brighter and declared she had not been at all dull. The shepherd had been to inquire after her, and had brought her the most beautiful wild flowers, and had shown her a portrait of his mother, who was quite lovely. "Such a sweet, good, refined face," said Juliet; "I do not wonder now that he is an exceptional man, for he evidently had a most exceptional mother."

That afternoon Sir Launcelot and Mr. Hogg called and stayed to tea; they also called again in the evening and stayed to coffee. It is possible these manoeuvres might have been repeated the following day had not a check been given them by a letter from Betty's papa, which arrived next morning, stating that his business had been finished sooner than he expected, and he hoped to be with his

darlings that evening. Juliet was better, and the girls were sitting out on a bench in a quiet corner of the road when they read the letter. They looked at each other blankly.

"He will take us on to Bettws-y-Coed to-morrow," said Betty, with a glimmer of tears in her blue eyes.

Juliet said nothing, but a little lump rose in her throat as she realised that soon Pen-y-gwryd—and its inmates—would be things of the past. At this moment Sir Launcelot came along the road accompanied by the shepherd, who carried a posy of wild flowers. They came up to speak to the girls.

"I hope you have not had bad news," said Sir Launcelot, looking first at their faces and then at the open letter in Betty's lap.

"No," replied Betty, huskily; "but papa comes home to-night and will take us on to Bettws-y-Coed to-morrow."

For a moment Sir Launcelot and the shepherd looked as blank as the girls, then they exchanged a curious and significant look with each other.

"Miss Tompkins," said Sir Launcelot, nervously, "since this is to be our last day together, will you come for a little walk with me?—I have—something—to say to you."

Without a word Betty put on the hat in her hand and joined him. The two walked slowly away down the valley in the sunshine, leaving Juliet on the bench, with the shepherd holding his posy of wild flowers by her side. The little girl looked after them wistfully, realising vaguely that some great happiness was coming to Betty. But it would take Betty from her, and Betty was all she had! She felt lonely, and looked up, half unconsciously, at the shepherd, with a longing for sympathy she could not repress. The shepherd's eyes met hers, and young as she was, Juliet could not mistake that burning gaze. She saw there all she wanted: comprehension, sympathy, tenderness, nay more, passionate love. Another moment and the shepherd was by her side, holding her hand in his, thrilling her through and through with eloquent words of love. She was amazed and felt as if she had passed into a dream. The man by her side had become transformed, he was no longer countrified, his accent and manner had changed. It was Mr. Hogg's voice, Mr. Hogg's manner.

"Oh! who are you? tell me!" she cried, bewildered and half frightened.

The shepherd checked himself suddenly, and, putting up his hand, brushed off hastily first an auburn wig and then the auburn whiskers and moustache; standing revealed as Mr. Hogg. Juliet gazed at him, first incredulously and then with rising anger. He had been masquerading then, taking her in, making fun of her all these days! It was a bitter thought and overpowered every other.

"How could you?" she said. "You have played an idle and cruel jest upon me;" and, hardly able to suppress her tears, she leaned back and covered her burning face with her hands.

"Juliet," said Mr. Hogg gravely, "you almost challenged me to this jest, but it is no idle one. I adopted my disguise, in the first instance, to save you from danger, fearing you would reject a guide in the shape of Mr. Hogg. I continued to personate the shepherd because it gave me double opportunities of seeing you, and, I hoped, of winning you. I love you most intensely and truly. I ask you to give yourself to me, to come and brighten my home, and share my work, and give me the love I need so sorely. Juliet, will you come to me?"

The voice was beautifully tender and pleading, but Juliet was smarting under a sense of humiliation and shut her heart against it. "I would rather you went away," she answered, coldly, without even looking up at him.

Her lover got up, and his voice, when he spoke, showed how deeply he was wounded. "I would have loved you dearly," he said, looking down at her; "I would have sheltered you from every sorrow, I would have cared for you and protected you to the end of my life; but you think nothing of my love, you throw it away, and so—I leave you. Farewell, Juliet."

Then he left her and walked down the road with the flowers still in his hand. The choked feeling came back into Juliet's throat as she watched him walking away from her. It came over her suddenly that she was sending away something very precious, something she longed for deeply in her heart. Strange to say, it was not Mr. Hogg at all who was in her mind as she watched the retreating figure, but the shepherd only. The shepherd who had saved her life, who had carried her so tenderly in his arms down the mountain side, who would have loved her and cared for her all his life! She could not let him go. She called after him wildly. He turned, and she ran after him sobbing. He held out his arms to her when he saw her face, and she ran into them, and clung to him almost as she had clung that day on the mountain side.

"Oh, Shepherd, dear Shepherd, do not leave me," she said, between her sobs; "stay with me and love me for ever."



FAIR NORMANDY.

By CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," ETC. ETC.



HAMBYE, INTERIOR OF ABBEY.

I HAVE mentioned elsewhere that but for certain turnings and windings of the road, you might, from the roof of the exquisite castle of Creully, see the far-off spires of Bayeux. One fine day we extended our drive and there took flight ; for the old town exacts the homage of a visit. It need not extend itself beyond a morning call, but this at least it demands.

The drive alone would reward one for the undertaking, and Bayeux comes in as a "*pièce de résistance*" at the end.

In truth it is somewhat disappointing. In its general aspect,

the old town possesses very little in the way of antiquity. With one or two exceptions : charming little bits which form a fine composition and carry one back to the picturesque Middle Ages : Bayeux is much more a town of to-day than of the past. It seems to spend a very dreamy existence. It is watered by the Aure, a small river whose life is as placid as that of the inhabitants. A bridge crosses it on the outskirts of the town ; houses and trees find their quiet reflection upon its surface, and the inevitable washerwomen upon the banks give it an element of life and movement that would otherwise be wanting.

The streets are almost deserted. "What's this dull town to me" might have been written of it, and certainly no Robin is to be

seen there on ordinary occasions. It is small, consisting of two principal streets, displaying the few sleepy shops of the town, and the specimens of mediæval architecture already alluded to.

Bayeux has had its history, and goes far back to the second century. In the fourth century it is mentioned by a Roman poet under the name of Bajocassis, and the first town was called Augustodurum by the Romans. Later on it became the capital of the Bessin. It was converted to Christianity in the fourth century by St. Spirus, who founded the Bishopric. It was taken by Edward III. in 1346, and by Henry V. in 1417, and in the thirteenth century it bravely resisted an invasion of the Saxons. It has been frequently burnt. In 1450 Charles VII. retook it from the English; but it went through troubled times, wars and bloodshed, until 1590, when it fell under the quieter rule of Henri IV. of France. Since then it has enjoyed an even, tranquil existence.

To-day its principal attractions are its cathedral and its tapestry. The former has been completely restored; the latter flourishes under glass cases in the museum. Both were gigantic works to undertake; and if the architect of Bayeux Cathedral was a man of genius, Queen Matilda must have been a woman of very rare patience.

On the site of the cathedral there formerly existed a Romanesque church. This, burnt down in the year 1046, and rebuilt in the days of William the Conqueror, was again destroyed in 1106 when Henry I. of England sacked and set fire to the whole town.

After that arose the present cathedral, but it has been subjected to many changes and additions. It is a fine Gothic edifice dating from the middle of the thirteenth century, though portions of it, belonging to the previous church consecrated by William the Conqueror, date from the twelfth. It has a very fine west front in pointed Gothic. The three porches are thirteenth century, florid in style, decorated with magnificent bas-reliefs and ornamental foliage. The steeples are twelfth century and, crowned by their beautiful spires, give the west front a very imposing appearance. The tone of the exterior is scarcely pleasing; neither red nor yellow; but seems fading from the one colour into the other. It is not effective, and is wanting in that look of antiquity which gives so great a charm to the buildings of the past. The spires form a landmark in the country, conspicuous in the plains and rivalling the hills.

The interior is long and imposing. The arches on the left of the nave are Norman, those on the right Gothic, forming a singular contrast. The heaviness of the piers is relieved by diapered patterns upon the walls. Above the arches is a low trefoiled arcade forming the balustrade of the triforium, though the church does not possess a true triforium, excepting in the choir, and the clerestory above is lighted by high and narrow windows. It is all thirteenth century work; this upper portion light and graceful as the lower is heavy and dignified. The arches and clustered pillars of the crossing and the

choir are very beautiful, and were built by Henry de Beaumont, who was Bishop in 1205. There is a great deal of rich and beautiful carving about the church. The stalls are also finely carved in the Renaissance style and date from the sixteenth century.

Not far from the cathedral, and at right angles with it, is the small museum containing the tapestry. It must have been a work of endless time, and is ascribed to Matilda, Queen of William the Conqueror.

It is done on white linen cloth, now browned with age, yet in perfect preservation. It is two hundred and thirty feet long and eighteen inches wide, and is kept stretched out to view under upright glass cases. The work is done in coloured worsteds, and the subjects are scenes from the life of William the Conqueror, illustrating his progress in taking England. These scenes are explained by Latin inscriptions, without which it would sometimes be difficult to interpret them. The figures, rudely formed, and generally in outline, are quaint and curious. The English are depicted with moustaches, the Normans without. The worsteds have wonderfully kept their colours. The borders consist of scenes taken from *Æsop's Fables*. Historically the tapestry is valuable and interesting. Towards the end we come to the Battle of Hastings, and the slain lying upon the field; and it is supposed that only the death of Matilda prevented the final scene from being worked—the Coronation of William.

These two subjects, the cathedral and the tapestry, make Bayeux not only worth visiting, but not to be passed over; but the town possesses little else. Two or three hours are sufficient to devote to it, and it may be taken in the day's journey from one place to another. We found the hotel a little primitive, but sufficiently comfortable, and famous for its delicious fresh lobsters; for Bayeux is only five miles from the sea.

Many places one leaves with regret, but when we said good-bye to Bayeux we left no regret behind us. In all but the cathedral and the tapestry, H. C. was disappointed. It was his first visit there, but I who had seen it before knew what to expect. What he had thought to find, I scarcely gathered: a mediæval old town, full of an antique atmosphere and chivalric remains; a dream of fair women who, of course, would bow down before him—they always do so; studies in attitude; graceful kneeling penitents in quiet corners of remote side chapels.

All were conspicuous by their absence. The streets were deserted. No fair women were abroad; and as for the cathedral—either the fair ladies of Bayeux are saints and need no shriving, or they are still in a state of impenitence. However that might be, H. C. was disappointed, and he threw up his cap and cried hurrah as we bowled away from Bayeux and left it to the quiet enjoyment of its wavering, whispering trees.

When we returned to Caen, it seemed quite noisy, lively and bustling after the deadness of Bayeux. Yet is Bayeux a chapter in

the volume which comprises the History of Normandy, the times of William the Conqueror and all the scenes and events with which he is for ever associated.

But the day came when we must leave Caen also, and even here I do not know that we left many regrets behind us. For if Caen possesses many charms, it has its drawbacks. Especially is the air close and relaxing, weighing you down with a feeling of depression. The hotels are not really comfortable, and you are not at your ease. You make the best of things, which is wisdom and half the battle ; but it is not paradise, and if you persuade yourself that it is so, like the little Marchioness you must "make believe" to a great extent. And she, after all, was like a certain friend of the writer, who shall be nameless : she mixed up her orange-peel with water and declared it wine, but she knew all the time she was deceiving herself ; and he, having joined the Temperance Society, squeezes his orange into a wine-glass and declares that it is better than champagne, but he, too, knows that he is deceiving himself ; and when the champagne goes round and he declines it, a hungry, regretful, dissatisfied look comes into his eyes, and a secret contemptuous glance is thrown at the oranges, followed up by a quiet curling of the lip in scorn. We all try and "make believe" on many an occasion through life ; we declare that this is so and that is not ; but we never really cheat ourselves ; we are only children of a larger growth, playing at Hide-and-Seek not only with each other but with our own hearts and minds.

We left Caen one fine day for Coutances. The journey was long because the train was slow, and we passed through much interesting scenery of the true Norman type—an equivalent to saying that it much resembled the English. But it grew monotonous at last, and we were not sorry, on reaching St. Lo, to find that we had more than an hour to wait. This would give us time to see something of the place and the church, which all looked highly picturesque and interesting as we approached it from the railway.

It is built on a hill, and the church towers rise nobly. It seemed a flourishing little town, with a certain amount of animation about it. The streets were steep, and we had a sharp climb to the church. The whole aspect of the place was picturesque, and though most of the houses were comparatively modern, a few of the really ancient were amongst the most interesting examples that we found in Normandy. The base of the hill is washed by the waters of the Vire, and the river goes winding away in the far-off plains, whilst many small streams add to the charm of the landscape. The Vire runs its course through lovely orchards and valleys, and the walks along its banks form one of the principal attractions of St. Lo.

The church crowns the hill, which overlooks the surrounding plains, and from which the view is magnificent. The building is an imposing Gothic edifice of the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Its west front possesses a good decorated arcade and central window,

but its Flamboyant additions have not improved it. On the north side of the church is an exterior stone pulpit, very quaint, of fifteenth century work. Here in days gone by, when the church

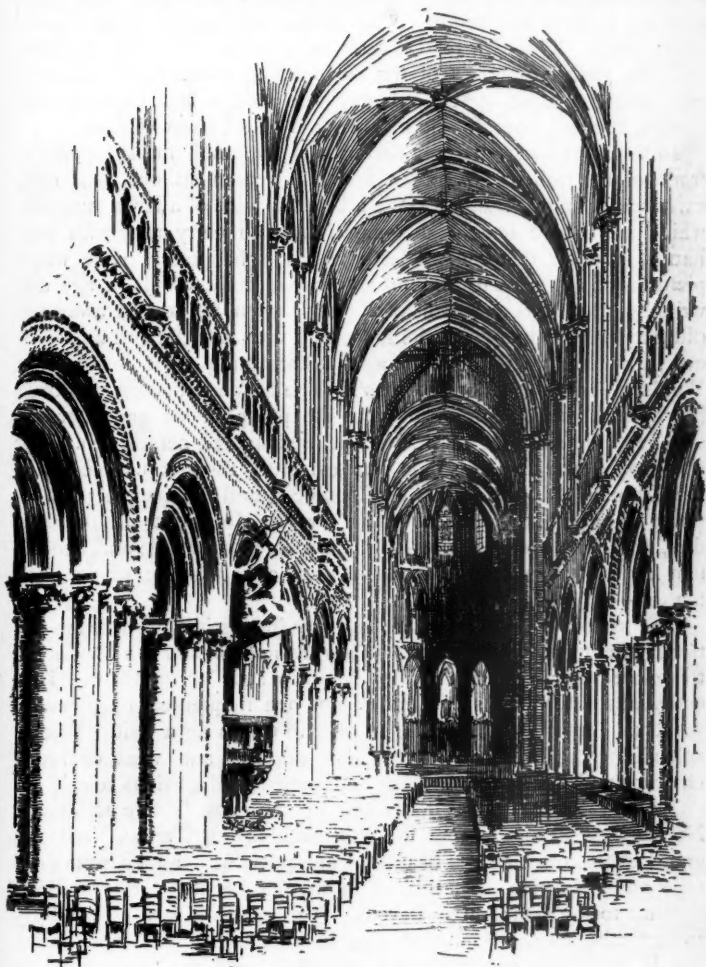


COUTANCES.

was a cathedral, all the episcopal announcements, temporal and spiritual, were given out, and it remains as a curious and artistic relic of the past.

The town takes its name from Lo, or Laud, a saintly bishop of

Coutances, who lived in the sixth century. In the days of Charlemagne the town was strongly fortified; but in 889 the Normans burnt it to the ground and massacred a great part of the inhabitants.



INTERIOR OF BAYEUX CATHEDRAL.

It was frequently taken after that by the French and English, and it became the scene of many religious persecutions.

We had a sharp descent back to the station, where the train was getting up steam for Coutances, and in about an hour's time the

houses and churches of the old town, also on a hill, came into view.

Coutances is indeed "a city set on a hill," and crowning it is its magnificent cathedral, which towers above the houses, and seems reaching towards the clouds. The streets are narrow, ill-paved, and often steep. The high road is built on a terrace cut in the hill-side, and the views from this of the surrounding country are extensive and often romantic, stretching away into valleys and orchards and flowing streams, bounded by hills clothed with richest verdure.

In the town itself, the only flat part is the small market place in front of the cathedral, where a few old women sit out their daily existence selling vegetables. We asked the price of a large pumpkin, which we should have had some trouble to carry away with both hands, and for this she modestly asked a halfpenny. She was a picturesque old woman, from an antiquarian point of view: age and wrinkles, grey hairs and bent back; and when we turned away and did not take her pumpkin, she looked up with pathetic and appealing eyes, which seemed to protest against bargaining for a lower price. Would we have three for two sous? The look went straight to one's heart, and though we did not take the pumpkin we gave her the sous; and we saw that for that day at least she felt herself rich. But she looked puzzled also, and she evidently thought us eccentric: Englishmen did not often visit Coutances, and few people paid for pumpkins which they did not take away. Her sight was growing dim, no doubt, and she failed to discern H. C.'s amiable and benevolent expression, which would have been a key to the whole small matter—not small to her.

The streets of Coutances are not very interesting. There are few traces of antiquity about them. They are narrow, and the houses are too close to each other. They have no style or grandeur. It is essentially a town of small trade; not one frequented by pleasure-seekers. Yet how much it has to offer in return for a visit. What a splendid cathedral; how grand; how severe! and what charming environs and wonderful châteaux and ancient and glorious ruins!

Its cathedral is without doubt one of the finest Gothic edifices in Normandy. It dates from the thirteenth century, and its massive grandeur possesses all the beauty of antiquity, with all its wonderful tone and colouring. In this, as in many other ways, it is a direct contrast to the cathedral of Bayeux. The charm of tone is necessary to perfecting even the most finished architecture. The whole building is wonderful in design and execution, and the justness of its proportions. Unlike most of the cathedrals of Normandy, the spires crowning the west towers exactly resemble each other. The central tower is without a spire, but it is very fine: it opens to the lantern inside, beneath which one is lost in admiration when gazing upwards at its beauty and elegance. The exterior of the east end is magnificent, but is so close to the gardens of the bishopric that it is almost

impossible to obtain a proper view of it. Unfortunately, too, we found it in the hands of the workmen, like most of the churches and cathedrals that we visited this time. A general and unhappy spirit of restoration seems to have been poured out upon Normandy.

The interior is worthy of the exterior. It is of great extent, and its feeling of vastness is increased by the rare fact that the side chapels have open walls, so that the sight penetrates from one end of the building to the other. These open screens of mullioned tracery separating the chapels correspond in design with the tracery of the windows, and the whole effect is one of extreme beauty and refinement. The choir is isolated from the aisles by being raised four steps above them, with admirable effect; and the same peculiarity is found at Bayeux. The central aisle has a blind triforium, surmounted by a clerestory of great beauty, and the windows have some very beautiful glass of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries.

One is never tired of gazing at this wonderful cathedral, with its peaks and pinnacles, its flying buttresses, its beautiful pointed windows, its perfect spires, and its bold and splendid tower. It rises majestically on the very summit of the hill, far above all surrounding buildings, looking down upon the hills and valleys, the smiling orchards, the running streams of Fair Normandy: a matchless vision of earth's glories. It overshadows the quiet streets of the old town: streets that are old rather than quaint, and about which there is a certain dilapidated air, as if the inhabitants did not too often paint the outside of their houses. There is no attempt at artistic effect—at beautifying their windows by flowers and similar “quiet attentions:” the inhabitants may be thrifty, but they are not rich. For beauty and grandeur, and the influence that these have upon the mind, they must go to that majestic cathedral, which seems to look down upon them with protecting power and sanctifying influence. The old women in the market-place, selling their pumpkins, and for ever dwelling under the refuge of its walls, ought to be holy and righteous; but there is such a thing as a familiarity that breeds contempt, and they probably are insensible to the beauty that is ever before them.

Within the building your footsteps echo in the vast expanse; a few stray worshippers, kneeling before their favourite shrines, seem lost in space; at the far end, gliding round into the Lady Chapel, a black-robed penitent looks shadowy and ghostlike. You hear no footsteps, you see no movement; nothing but a gliding motion, until the choir takes it beyond view, and it seems to have passed away into the unseen world.

Leaving the cathedral and the little market-place, with its old women, behind you, you come to a steep hill, which discloses the church of St. Peter's on the left. It is a remarkable building of various styles; a mixture of Gothic or Tudor and Renaissance. The tone is exquisite; dark, sombre, and mysterious; it looks a thousand years old, but dates only from the beginning of the fifteenth century.

The west doorway is flanked by two enormous buttresses, holding niches for bells and surmounted by an effective sixteenth century tower. Between the buttresses is a large window, and above it a row of small arcades decorated with trellised vine leaves, marking the first stage of the tower. Above this rises a second stage of sixteenth century Gothic, and the whole is crowned by a dome with a Renaissance lantern. The interior of the church is not remarkable. It is its wonderful tone that arrests the eye and challenges the admiration.

There is one more church in Coutances worth visiting, that of St. Nicholas. But whilst St. Peter's is interesting for its exterior, which is plain and heavy, St. Nicholas is only remarkable for its interior. The nave is Renaissance, and the transept is surmounted by a fine eighteenth century dome. The five arches of the nave are supported by very fine semi-cylindrical pillars, destitute of ornamentation; but the capitals of the choir are delicately sculptured. The church is not large, but it has a certain air of severity about it, and, for its size, it is dignified and impressive.

These three churches form the whole attraction of Coutances from an architectural point of view. They are sufficient. The cathedral is more than a host in itself; it is worth a long journey to visit; and during your sojourn in the town you will return to it over and over again, gazing upon its beauties, learning them by heart, and allowing their influence to sink into the mind. You will stand amazed before the majesty and intense severity of its west front, the wonderful lines of the towers, crowned by those glorious spires. You will long to throw open the great west portal that the vision of the interior might be revealed to you. At night, crowded with worshippers, brilliantly lighted, the pealing organ swelling through arch and aisle, it would indeed be a vision of Eden rather than of earth.

You will pass to the far east end, and the amiable builder who superintends the work now going on will take you on to the roof of his house, whence you look down upon the length of the building, and note all the wonderful harmony of detail, all its richness; pile rising above pile, peak above peak, roof above roof; the east end falling away in graceful flying buttresses supporting the pointed windows, the Lady Chapel terminating all. Then above the roof and towards the west rises the magnificent centre tower, an expansion of the Norman lantern, plainly meant for a spire, but beautiful and refined without it; and beyond all, the west towers, full of elegance and beauty, crowned by their spires, conclude the magnificent structure, which seems to raise its head proudly towards the blue dome of heaven, challenging the regions of cloudland.

We made the acquaintance of another structure whilst in Coutances, but of a very different kind. A passing erection which rose up in a night, and in a night disappeared. We were startled one morning by a noise of brazen instruments vigorously blown and drums loudly



COUTANCES CATHEDRAL.

beaten. It had quite a martial sound, and we wondered—not whether the Campbells were coming—but whether a revolution had broken out, or the Germans had re-invaded France, and Coutances was in a state of siege.

The sound drew nearer, and then a cavalcade passed up the street in a procession of one, a huge van drawn by four splendidly caparisoned horses, and the triumphal car all gilt and gingerbread. Ladies wonderfully attired, blew brazen instruments until they were purple in the face, and one feared for the consequences. They also beat the drums. The gentlemen, laurel-crowned, like Cæsar, drove their fiery steeds, and with shouts and cracking of whips added an accompaniment to the orchestra. All Coutances rushed to its doors and windows; the whole population turned out. Great was the excitement. A circus had arrived and unfurled its tent upon the low-lands behind the cathedral.

Of course everyone must go; and, of course, we must not stay away, declared our worthy landlord of the Hôtel d'Angleterre. "Messieurs," said he, "il faut aller pour encourager les autres."

And we went.

Alas for the feathers and spangles, for performance, performers and audience. It rained as it had never rained before. The clouds came down in streams and rivers. And these tents are not waterproof. When we entered, the orchestra was bravely doing its best. The ladies were blowing the double basses and beating the drums, the gentlemen were playing the fiddles and the French horns. There was great noise, very little harmony, and no melody whatever. The ladies were in wonderful costumes, ready to show off on bare-backed steeds when their turn came.

The audience increased slowly but surely, until the place was half full. Every few minutes a diversion was occasioned by someone having to go lower down or higher up, to escape a small stream that suddenly penetrated the tarpaulin and began trickling down their back. The performance itself may be imagined. It was of the usual sort: a mixture of foolish clowns and wonderful riding by ladies and gentlemen in airy fairy attire. And all the while the rain came down as if it meant to drown the world; and every now and then a blinding flash of lightning, blue and steely, would be followed by a crash that seemed to shake the very foundations of the earth. Nervous ladies gave little screams and crossed themselves, and wondered why to-night of all nights the elements should be warring and raging, as if they were vowing vengeance upon mankind at large.

We pitied the performers. They looked disappointed and depressed, though they went through their work bravely. But their life, and the lives of all such, must be very hard. After the first flush of youth and the excitement of early years, it can only be the stern necessity for daily bread, for keeping the wolf from the door and the

pot-au-feu boiling, that keeps them still appearing in unbecoming costumes, and jeopardising their lives in jumping through papered hoops and alighting on bare-backed steeds—or in the sawdust.

Who knows their stories ; their struggles and privations ; the silent heroism with which many go through their work to provide for children, for sick husband or wife, it may be, for aged father or mother ? The world is full of heroes and heroines, but we never hear of them. It is the bad and the worthless that we hear of. Evil stalks abroad with great noise, is seen and known ; comes to grief and tribulation, to wreck and ruin, to prison and the gallows. But the good is silent ; it makes no sign ; it does not boast ; it goes on its way with quiet endurance, and the grave closes over many a noble life that has formed part of the "salt of the earth."

Some such there may have been amongst the little troupe that night at Coutances, and it was sad to see them scanning the audience, and watching the curtain every time it moved in the hope that yet another was coming to swell the small rank in the "best places." To-morrow it would be a case of light coffers ; the wine would have to be strongly mixed with water, repasts curtailed.

But with it all they were French, and possessed the French lightness of temperament. They cannot be long unhappy. The smallest rift in the clouds is to them the promise of a fine day, and their spirits are ever ready to rise to the surface. Indeed, they are never far below it, for they have no great depths to be stirred. Their emotions, their joys and griefs are acute rather than profound, and succeed each other rapidly as sunshine and shadow on a windy day of small clouds.

As for the audience that night, we cannot say that they greatly impressed us. If they were a fair specimen of the people of Coutances, they were sufficiently common-place. The benches given up to the élite were very empty—who would brave such warring elements ?—and the humbler orders were not "fetching." There were no quaint costumes to give them picturesqueness and individuality. They were intensely amused at the performance ; the clowns were a great success ; they had never seen such horses and riding ; they stared open-mouthed and large-eyed ; but there was nothing interesting about them. Here and there, one, tired of shifting his seat and seeking a dry place, would put up an umbrella as a last resource, and this was the most original thing that we saw.

We went away perhaps the saddest of the assembly, for they all made the best of it and were happy enough, and accepted their fate ; whilst we moralised, and drew pictures and comparisons, and gave the reins to our imagination, and fancied all sorts of sad little histories ; and speculated upon fate and fortune, the mystery of existence, the why and the wherefore of the tragic element in life—and no solution came to our doubts and wonders. How can it do so to us finite beings, who cannot see the end from the beginning ; who know

that the threads of life are often tangled, but from whom the unraveling is hidden?

We left the tent whilst the lamps were still flaring and smoking, and the performers were bowing their last good-night to the audience, and went out into the dark night. The deluge had ceased in the last few minutes, with that "irony of fate," the performers might have argued, that so often accompanies us through life. But they knew nothing of metaphysics or philosophy; they only argued that the rain had ceased, and they would play again to-morrow night; and the moon and the stars would be shining, and there would be no empty benches; the coffers would be full, the wine undiluted.

The streets of Coutances were dark, the water still ran down them in small streams; not even the cats were abroad. As we went back to the inn, we took the cathedral on our way. It looked gloomy and majestic and portentous in the darkness, a thing of grandeur and vast extent, wrapt in a profound and mysterious silence that was almost appalling. We left it to its solitary reign: the reign of centuries passed, and probably of centuries to come.

The next morning we started for a long drive into the country—a pilgrimage to the ruins of Hambye. Never was pilgrimage more happily taken. The skies had wept away all their tears the night before, and the sun shone brilliantly.

No matter which way you leave Coutances, a sharp descent to the level of the valley is inevitable. The view as you look down is lovely and exhilarating; rich and luxuriant; a picture of still country life, interrupted by few signs of man's existence. Here and there a grey stone house, a rustic cottage, stands by the roadside or perched on the hill, or nestling and almost lost amidst waving trees. But the cottages have none of the beauty and picturesqueness of our English cottages; there is no village like an English village; as a rule, no churches so beautiful as our English village churches. In this we stand pre-eminent, however we may fall short in other ways. Abroad, with few exceptions, and no matter where, the village churches are visions of ugliness. But their exceptions are so great that they make up for much of the poverty which is the rule.

We descended then to the level of the valley, and the first thing to arrest our attention was the ancient and ruined aqueduct, of which the people of Coutances are so proud. It is their first and last question—Have you seen the aqueduct? Lying between two hills, it is most romantically situated. It dates from the thirteenth century, though restored in the sixteenth, and consists of five gigantic arches, four of which are thickly covered with ivy. There are also huge detached fragments standing in isolated places. It has been said to be Roman work, but is really the work of the Middle Ages. But these ruins are always beautiful; they give a charm to the landscape, and throw over it a halo of romance; the romance of antiquity and the past; the refinement of crumbling architecture. This particular

aqueduct somehow brings to mind the wonderful Claudian aqueduct of Rome, which is one of the glories of the Appian Way. One scarcely knows why, for the Roman aqueduct stretches across an immense open plain, and cuts sharply against the background of the wonderful skies of Rome: skies of such clear and matchless blue; skies more beautiful than all others, one knows not why or wherefore. We rave about the Italian skies, but those of Rome exceed them all.

The Coutances aqueduct, on the other hand, stretches across no vast Campagna. It is very much shut in by hills, and very little of it remains; but it is a perfect and picturesque ruin; it carries you



CHÂTEAU GRÂTOT.

back to the Middle Ages, and it comes upon the traveller with a certain amount of surprise.

We turned from it down the long road which was to lead us to our destination; the ruins of the ancient Abbaye of Hambye. On our way we were to see the Château Grâtot, and soon reached the narrow lane leading to it. The heavy rains had not been without their effect, and we had to wade through a perfect slough of despond in which the little horses often stuck fast. Then we came to an ancient archway, and passing through it, gazed upon the building which, of its kind, perhaps pleased us most of any that we saw in Normandy.

It was a dream building; large and ancient; built in the fifteenth century Flamboyant style and the seventeenth century Renaissance. The dark grey tone of the walls, full of gloom and grandeur, was as perfect as anything we had ever seen. It must once have been a

stately castle surrounded by a moat, which still remains. To the right is a fine flamboyant tower, and in the centre a round tower of fifteenth century, or even earlier work. The casements have deep mouldings, and the slated roof rises above picturesque dormer windows. The centre block of the building is seventeenth century, but the walls and towers round the moat are of the fifteenth.

It would be impossible to exaggerate its beauty and imposing dignity. A flight of steps leads up to the chief entrance, and in the doorway stood a picturesque old woman, holding a large dog by her side. She was the owner of the place; for its glory has departed, and it is now nothing but a farm-house. What once must have been a courtyard is now given over to a farm pool and other farm appurtenances; and cattle wend their way through the venerable gateway to their pastures.

The old woman was much interested in us and our performances. She stood to be photographed and was in despair at not being dressed for the occasion. She talked French with a strong flavour of the patois of the country, and was much concerned and raised her hands when she heard that we were English and had come from—to her—the ends of the earth. She showed us her kitchen or house place, which was bright with pans and plates and dresser shelves, and where the immense chimney testified to a past age of utility and gigantic resources: but otherwise there was little left to remind one of its original destiny. There was a time, perhaps, when the walls were panelled and ancient furniture dignified the room; but that was past; now the walls were whitewashed, and the furniture was rough and rude. Yet it is a place of rare beauty.

An upper room of the tower was very interesting with heraldic paintings and a fireplace with a hood. On the lintel of the window was the impression of a foot, said to be that of a fair dame who once threw herself from the window into the courtyard below, and was picked up dead. Her ghost of course haunts the château.

Bending over the moat outside, washing clothes, was a fair Normandy maiden, niece to the old woman on the steps. She formed a very pretty picture, with the water before her and the old château for background; forming, as H. C. remarked, with a tender glance at the maiden, a very refined and interesting composition. She begged us to take her photograph, but first wanted to go and adorn. This we assured her was unnecessary. The only stipulation we made was that she should be careful not to move.

She was evidently conscious of her good looks, and posed with great care, seriously considering whether she should be more effective bending over the water, or wringing clothes, or leaning back in an attitude of rest, her snow white linen in a small pile on a board beside her. The latter carried the day. She undertook not to move. But just as the performance commenced a distant voice called out "Katerine! Katerine!" "Oui, mon oncle!" she cried, and at the fatal moment turned her head completely round.

In vain we assured her that the thing was spoilt, and that for so pretty a person she was very aggravating. She could not take it in, and at last begged to be redone. But this was impossible; we had not another plate to devote to her.

We departed enchanted with the place. In our enthusiasm we both declared it was worth coming all the way from England only to see it. The day, too, was perfection, and threw strong lights and shadows about the place which added to its strange beauty.

We continued our drive through a fertile and interesting country, now passing a small village, now diving into long roads between hedges. At last we reached a small and primitive town, where nothing was particularly interesting except the market-place. This was crowded with country people, for it was market day, and the scene was busy and animated. Buyers and sellers were disputing and gesticulating after the manner of their kind. Everyone was absorbed in his own concerns. The whole roadway was thronged; no one would move. Our driver was evidently accustomed to their peculiar ways. He shouted and cracked his whip, and drove rough-shod amongst them. Only when under the very horses' heads would they move, and then they sprang right and left, and used bad language and declared they would have the law of him. To us it was amusing; we sat in state and looked on with dignified approval at our coachman's manoeuvres. The scene was original; the country people were interesting; their dress was peculiar, though of real costume one saw little or nothing.

We passed away from the crowd once more into the quiet roads. A sharp descent was before us, and the view over the surrounding country was magnificent. At the bottom we came to a small, somewhat poverty-stricken village, and at a very primitive inn we alighted. A very short walk, escorted by a very juvenile guide—the little son of the innkeeper—brought us to the object of our pleasant pilgrimage. A gate had to be unlocked and we passed into the hallowed precincts.

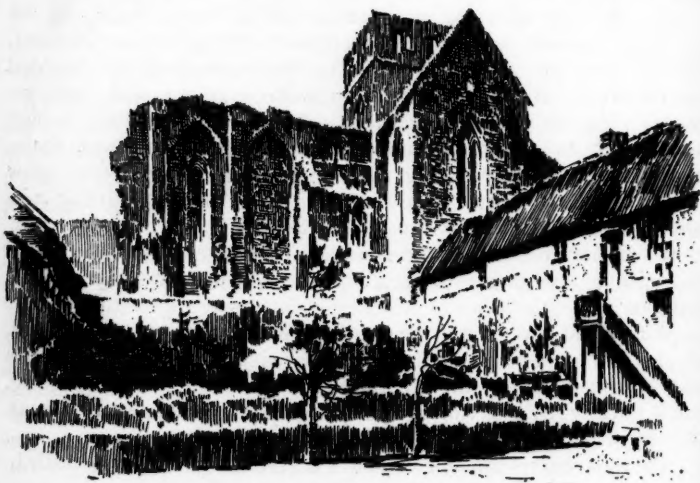
In point of ruin, it may be doubted if Normandy possesses anything so beautiful; and in Normandy or elsewhere it would be difficult to find its equal.

It is a wonderful Gothic remnant nestling in the valley of the Sienne, in so retired a corner, that it seems as if it would hide itself from the world. As a ruin it is perfect. The roof is gone and the west end, and in consequence it stands out against the clear background of sky like some gigantic, wonderful piece of fret or lace-work, full of the most ideal refinement.

It dates back to the twelfth century, though most of what is now visible is probably of the fifteenth. The walls are standing, though in a fragmentary condition, which adds to their charm. Many of the massive pillars at the east end still remain. The choir is of great extent, and is certainly one of the most ancient specimens in existence

of the pointed Norman or Transitional style. These pointed arches rest on columns or piers of great beauty, which seem to indicate the fifteenth century, the period when the Abbey was restored, if not almost rebuilt, by Joanne de Pagnel, the last representative of the founder of the Abbey. The side chapels are small and square, and of older date, combining the round and the pointed arch. In the centre of the cross is a tower resting on square piers which become octagonal at the base.

The whole ruin, like Grâtot, is a dream ; you feel as if you were gazing at a vision, not at anything earthly and substantial. You may take it from numberless points of view, and from every one of them obtain a rare and unfading impression. It rises to a great height,



RUINS OF HAMBYE, SHOWING MONASTIC BUILDINGS.

and in the days of its glory must have been of lofty and magnificent proportions. You only regret that anything so glorious should be so far out of the world ; so difficult of access, that when you turn your back upon it, you feel that it is probably for ever.

The buildings attached to it at right angles once formed the monastery of the Abbey. They also possess a peculiar charm, and as you gaze down upon them with the wonderful ruin for a background, you grow silent with admiration. It is now a private dwelling, or farm-house ; and a lovely chapter-house at the end has become a store-house for wood. The buildings are long and grey and old-world-looking, surrounded by gardens given up to fruit and vegetables—the useful rather than the ornamental. This, too, has become a farm-house, though the people, as far as we could judge, seemed to

combine a little of the refinements of life with their occupation, and the place was well kept.

The situation of the Abbey is as lovely as it is secluded. It is surrounded by verdure, by country roads bordered by hedges and green fields; whilst hills richly covered with trees lie near at hand. Not far off there is of course the inevitable little stream, that once no doubt was well-stocked with trout, whatever it may be now. Perhaps the fishes have departed with the monks who long since have joined the land of shadows. They do not haunt the Abbey. It is too open to the sky and the air to harbour ghosts. The only shadows it contains are those thrown by the sun in declining; long shadows of pillar and arch and pointed window, with its beautiful and crumbling tracery.

Whatever the ghosts of the dead-and-gone monks might do, we ourselves haunted these wonderful precincts until the very last moment. But we had ordered luncheon at the inn overlooking the crowded market-place; and we had to depart at last. It was with great reluctance that we did so, with many a backward look: many a sigh given to the beauty on which we should probably never gaze again. For it is out of the way and out of the world; few people know of it; fewer still visit it; but it is one of those spots that once seen are loved for ever, and for ever remembered.

We turned from it at last, and walked back to the little inn, where our patient horses were waiting. It was a long climb up the hill back to the little town, of which the name has escaped me. But once there, the scene had changed. The market-place was empty, the people had departed, scarcely a stall remained, buyers and sellers had scattered. The contrast was magical, and to us disappointing, for we had hoped to get many an interesting group with a small instantaneous camera we had with us.

We went on to the inn, which was primitive and unpleasantly crowded with farmers and farmers' wives and daughters; not exhibiting any interesting Norman costumes, but got up in hats and bonnets and feathers, and all the colours of the rainbow; rough, awkward people decked out like Indian war chiefs, though a little less airy in costume; people that are the most uninteresting on the face of the earth.

We preferred waiting in the kitchen of the establishment, a curious place, with a large chimney, where the presiding goddess in the form of the landlady flourished an enormous frying-pan, and stirred up the pot-au-feu, and broke countless eggs into a basin, and initiated us into the mystery of making an omelette. Louis XV.'s famous cook could not have sent up a better. Her cooking altogether was above her establishment, and we thought her charges were decidedly above both.

The crowded dining-room was a trial, but if adversity makes one acquainted with strange bedfellows, so also does travelling. In these

days, indeed, it is the great drawback to the charm of visiting new scenes and revelling in the beauties of nature. But there can be no rose without a thorn, no pleasure without pain.

To the inn, also, we presently said farewell, and turned our faces towards Coutances. The day had given us much to remember; lovely visions to haunt our dreams and occupy our waking thoughts; recollections to lay up in store for a time, should it ever come, when the pleasures of travelling have ceased to delight, and the arm-chair and the chimney corner induce to repose; and the spirit is loosening from the things of earth, and is more frequently lost in contemplation of its far-off flight to the regions beyond the veil.



THE GUERDON.

LILY and rose in my garden,
Why are you nodding at me?
Cannot I pass to my lover
But you are watching to see?

Lily and rose—in sweet pity,
Do not keep barring my way;
I was so happy at starting—
Can't I be happy alway?

Jealous rose, clinging and clasping,
Think you such bonds are secure?
Painful may be—but not lasting,
Love hath taught how to endure.

Lily and rose, you are jealous,
Heard you my love, I suppose,
Call me "Of lilies the fairest,
Roses, the sweetest blush-rose."

Lily and rose, don't be angry,
Spare this *one* lover to me;
You have so many—I've watched them,
Butterflies, birds and a bee.

If you'll release me—as guerdon
Promise I just at the least—
Morrow is fixed for my bridal,
You shall be plucked for the feast!

A. E. G.

THAT AWFUL BACTERIA!

BY ARTHUR BROWNING.

I AM an amateur actor ; also as an amateur, and not for filthy lucre—except on behalf of unctuous Charity—I give some attention to photography, politics, orchids, pessimism, social reforms, and of course to literature. By profession I am an Amateur—in everything. As such, I am exquisitely hated and despised by the majority of my acquaintances ; by all, except my brother amateurs. Therefore I prefer to adopt a spurious name in the narration I am about to make.

At the beginning of the new year I was staying in Devonshire with an old friend of my jovial and careless college days. Being nearly forty, an age which people over sixty cheerfully call the prime of life, I am entitled to speak critically of my early manhood. As one grows older, the vanities of life, the frivolity of nothingness and the nothingness of frivolity, become distasteful. Habit, however, is a stern master, and practice less Protean than theory. Marriage usually solves the problem : with change of state, change of life is easy. But I am a bachelor, and thereby hangs my tale.

My Devonshire host, a married man, whom I had not seen for some years, I found with a daughter, aged eighteen—how time flies !—and a son, one year younger, besides four other children. My friends were about to indulge in some private theatricals, and to “take a part” was the ostensible object of my visit. The grand old country house was full of guests, including the whole of our theatrical company ; a stage had been put up in one of the rooms, and on the day following my arrival rehearsals began with solemn zeal.

It is said that marriages are made in heaven. I am of opinion that more are made on the stage than anywhere—particularly on the amateur stage. Professionals, perhaps, grow hardened by long custom ; yet they, for the most part, are as exclusive in matrimonial matters as the Jews ; but to the amateur a “love-part” is frequently baccalaurean suicide, and its value is keenly appreciated by match-making mammas and other society scorpions. With some misgiving, therefore, I learnt from my genial hostess that the play selected was the perennial “Pygmalion and Galatea ;” that to me was allotted the part of Chrysos ; that “Galathea” was a “*lovely* girl” and a “*perfect* actress”—delightfully vague phrases, typical of genial hostesses. The play had been ruthlessly cut down by a “local author” of dubious fame and talent, but of praiseworthy pseudonymity, who called the process “writing-up.” The result of this mutilation was to thrust poor Chrysos into a far more prominent position than ever the original author intended ; and I soon discovered that success mainly depended

upon Galatea—really a pretty, clever girl—and myself. So I studied the part very carefully, determined to do my best. I went even so far as to consult books on Greek antiquities for details of costume and character; and thus I resolved that Chrysos must have the correct Greek walking-stick or staff, the *bacteria*. It was an inspiration! How effective it would look! What a cover to stage-fright—what a medium for “business”! But how to get one?

Suddenly I remembered Halsby, one of my amateur-acting friends. His reputation chiefly rests on success obtained in performances of the dramas of Æschylus—home-made versions; I remembered that in the course of a nomadic life he had acquired a very notable article, which he called a “bacteria,” and used as one in his Greek plays. I have heard that originally it was nothing more or less than a broom-stick; but Halsby, with the enthusiasm of genius, took counsel with certain learned professors, and, aided by a vast number of tools and much glue, had fashioned a wondrously realistic piece of work, quite worthy of modern stage-craft. I wrote at once to Halsby, telling him of the play, and asking for the loan of his bacteria, as I had never seen one in any shop. Two days later I received the following note:—

“DEAR THOMPSON,—I will lend you my bacteria on the 12th with pleasure. You cannot *buy* them; there is none like mine in England! On the 13th, curiously enough, I am passing through Broxhead, which you say is your station; I shall then be on my way to Gloucester to act, so kindly meet me at 12.10 *with the bacteria*, which you shall receive on the morning of the 12th. My sister, whom I think you have met, is to go with me to Gloucester, so mind you come to the station yourself.

“Yours sincerely,

“GEOFFREY HALSBY.”

The morning of the twelfth of January duly dawned, and duly gave way to the afternoon. Soon after dusk, when I had given up all hope, the “bacteria” actually arrived, wrapped up like a fishing-rod, with instructions for use from the enthusiastic Halsby. “Pygmalion and Galatea,” to my great relief, was a thorough success, and the evening’s entertainment enjoyable, not only to the actors but also to the audience. Moreover, I succeeded in avoiding all amatory traps. In short, everything proceeded satisfactorily until “12.10” the following day. Then my adventures began.

I arrived at the station—with the “bacteria”—precisely five minutes after the train was due. Fortunately, or unfortunately as events may show, the train also was behind time, and it steamed up precisely five minutes late, as I reached the platform. To my astonishment, no Halsby was to be seen. After wriggling along the train, thrusting my head into various carriages in somewhat eccentric manner, I became aware of a lady, at the window of a first-class

compartment, making violent signs to attract my attention. I approached, and opened the door.

"I am Miss Halsby," she said, holding out her hand. "The bacteria ——"

At this moment the guard whistled and the engine shrieked. To avoid further loss of time the train had only stayed one minute, and was already moving. I jumped in to lay my parcel on the rack; I heard the door banged and *locked* behind me; I turned and found myself a prisoner.

Miss Halsby had been alone in the carriage when I entered, and, for some seconds after we had left the station, we gazed at one another in mute dismay. Presently Miss Halsby broke the spell by a merry peal of laughter. In spite of my annoyance, in spite of the suspicion with which I regarded the whole of her sex, I could not prevent myself from thinking how fascinating she looked.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Where is your brother?" I rejoined.

We laughed absurdly. Recovering, I repeated my question, still standing, for I felt an insane desire to take a header through the window. Somehow, the idea of another stoppage never presented itself; I, a bachelor, appeared eternally doomed to the terrible companionship of an unprotected female.

"My brother was suddenly seized with influenza yesterday afternoon. We telegraphed to Gloucester, and the people there have found a substitute, and I," she added with a twinkle of the eyes, "have got the 'bacteria,' as Geoff. *will* call it, so it's all right. But won't you sit down? We don't stop now for nearly an hour."

This brought me to my senses. The rugs were re-arranged, I was persuaded by my companion to light my pipe, and we prepared to spend as comfortable a time as possible. We had met at a dance some five years previously, when Miss Halsby was only just "out." I confessed frankly that I did not at first remember her, to which she retorted by saying that she only knew me by the "bacteria." That awful "bacteria!" The cause of my unlooked-for journey. How little I knew what was coming!

"Are you going to perform in the Gloucester theatricals?" I presently asked.

"No; I am only going to assist in the preparations. I expect there will be plenty to do, and women always have to do everything."

"Yes," I replied drily, in a tone that might mean anything: "they generally have a finger in the pie, whatever it is."

"You're very rude, Mr. Thompson. But, seriously, don't you think women are peculiarly suited to looking after the details of things, which men never think of?"

"My dear Miss Halsby, woman herself is merely a detail!"

"Really, Mr. Thompson"—with pretended indignation—"I refuse to utter another word."

I smoked on in silence, awaiting her next remark. I knew it would soon come.

"I begin to think you are that most odious kind of man, or so-called man, a 'woman-hater.'"

"I have been a bachelor all my life," I replied, humbly.

"Anyone could see that."

"Perhaps I may yet learn wisdom. But your brother, is he very bad?"

"The usual symptoms, so graphically described in all the papers. He thinks he is at death's door, but he will be all right in a day or two."

"How very heartless! Have *you* had it?"

"No, and I don't mean to. It's a great deal to do with the nerves. Have you?"

"Not yet, but I shall; and so will you."

We both laughed.

"It comes on *very* suddenly in some cases," I went on, "and it may come at any moment. It is a veritable sword of Damocles."

"Well, I'm not afraid of it, so we'll change the subject. Have you had any skating?"

The conversation flowed on. We discussed the relative value of acmes and other skates, the latest novels, the theatres, and so forth. After my imprisonment had thus lasted a pleasant half-hour, my companion bade me open the window. I did so. It was bitterly cold—freezing.

"Are you ill?" I asked. Miss Halsby was white as the scarf around her neck.

"I feel faint; please shut the window, it is so cold."

My fears were thoroughly awakened. As I closed the window our eyes met.

"I've
"You've" } got it!" we exclaimed simultaneously.

I arose and wrapped her entirely in rugs. She was shivering from head to foot, and in her present abject misery formed a melancholy contrast to her appearance a short time before. I produced from my pocket a flask of whisky-and-water, which I had heard was the orthodox drink recommended by the faculty.

"I am going to be your doctor. You must please take some of this."

After considerable difficulty I prevailed upon Miss Halsby to sip the whisky in feminine fashion. She pronounced herself better, but the result was not obvious, and by the time we were due at the junction for Gloucester, my fair comrade was very limp and helpless. As we entered the station she fainted in my arms. Here was a situation for a bachelor of nearly forty years' standing!

An hour later Miss Halsby and myself were once more in a first-class compartment, engaged—I mean the compartment, not the occupants. I had carried her to the nearest waiting-room, and sent for a doctor. He brought her round, pronounced her a victim to the epidemic, and recommended an instant return home. I found

that there was a train back almost immediately, secured a compartment, and ultimately delivered my fair but feeble companion in safety to her parents. Then, as in a dream, I returned to Broxhead, and that night at dinner I posed as a hero for the first time in my life.

I found my rooms in town strangely dull on, leaving my friends at Broxhead. My thoughts would persist in running to that unexpected railway journey. In spite of a correspondence on orchids in the *Daily Wire*, in spite of the speech by a Bishop on Pessimism, and an article on Socialism by a Duke, I felt things were not as they had been. I could say, with Wordsworth, "There hath past away a glory from the earth." The climax came a week ago, when I found myself actually refusing an invitation to "take a part." I was seriously considering the advisability of consulting a physician and being ordered abroad for change of air, or to drink the waters, when, yesterday morning, I received this note from Halsby:—

"DEAR THOMPSON,—I cannot forgive myself for never having written to thank you for your kindness to my sister during the I—— (I dare not write the word). We have just returned from a month's convalescence at the sea-side, and we want you to come and spend a few days with us. Do come, and at once. And stay as long as you can.

"Yours gratefully,

"GEOFFREY HALSBY."

After due deliberation, I have decided to go to-morrow. Am I—horrid phrase—in love? I do not know. As yet I have made no profession of it. I am still an Amateur—in everything!



SONNET.

To learn, we should forget. Too much we know
To see the simplest truths. We have one day—
One morn, one noon, one night on earth we stay.
Yet noon from morn, and from noon night, to show
We ever seek. With doubt perplexed we go,
Much wondering in our poor childish mind,
Unlike grey dawn of morn, hot noon to find.
And thus we vex and weary life; thus flow
Our hours; thus our little day is worn,
And dark night closing round, untaught we stand
Upon the threshold of the other morn.
Then, like poor mariner cast on strange land
He knows not of, so by Time's silent strand
We sit us down, bewildered and forlorn!

JULIA KAVANAGH.

THE END OF THE TRAGEDY.

"Highlands, Tuesday.

"DEAR OLD BLAIR,—I have just heard you are back again in England, and feel inclined to begin in Bob Acres' fashion, that you did not let me know of your return. Will Monday next suit you for your long-promised visit here? We are just by ourselves, and not going into society at present, so it is a horribly selfish thing to ask you down. But if you want a thorough rest after your globe-trotting and are willing to perform an act of Christian charity at one and the same time, now is your chance. Wire me you'll take the two o'clock from Cannon Street, and I will drive in to meet you at this end.

"Yours ever,

"WILLIAM SEAGRAVE.

"Mind you come. I shan't take *No* for an answer."

This was the note I found awaiting me at the club one day last July, and I promptly sent off a hearty acceptance. I had been so rushed from pillar to post during the last four years in my capacity of private doctor to an erratic old man who was apparently anxious to discover the secret of perpetual motion, that the chief charm of the invitation to Highlands was its alleged quietness. Besides, I was really anxious to see Will Seagrave again, for our friendship dated from Rugby days, and until his marriage, which occurred some six months before I fell in with the old man, the cure of whose imaginary woes was to make my fortune (*N.B. It didn't!*), he and I had always got on admirably together. Whether we were to get on quite so well now that there was a Mrs. Will was of course an open question.

By the bye, it seemed odd that there was no mention of her in his letter. For the first three years I had heard from him pretty frequently while I had been abroad, and had grown rather tired of the "Olive says this," and "Olive does the other," with which his letters were filled. She had been a young widow with one little boy when Will had married her, and it had sometimes occurred to me to wonder if he ever regretted that the fine estate of which he was temporary master must necessarily be inherited by Guy Cheshunt's lad instead of his own. Apparently he never thought of it. Little Robin Cheshunt seemed to have quite as firm a hold upon his affection as had his own two youngsters; and no miss in her teens could possibly have found more to say about her first lover than Will Seagrave of his beautiful wife. I grew decidedly tired of it after a bit. After all, one can have, especially when one doesn't know them, too much of other men's wives.

"She might as well have sent me a message, or Will might have invented it for her," I thought, for, for a man, he was rather unusually strong in little politenesses of that sort. "I suppose there has been a death in the family, if they are not going out much at present. Wonder who it is!"

Three days later I and my traps were deposited at the country station where Will Seagrave was to have met me, but by some mischance he had not arrived. Having a righteous horror of country flies, and remembering Will's unpunctuality of old, I determined to wait where I was until either he or a messenger from Highlands should put in an appearance. I had just lighted my second cigarette when a couple of men came out of the station hotel, by the doorway of which I was lounging, and having nothing better to do, I stood listening to what they were saying. They were apparently local tradesmen who had been having a heated argument over their pipes, and each was unwilling to leave the other unconvinced.

"I tell you," said one, striking his hands together impatiently—"I tell you it is pure nonsense. It don't stand to no manner of reason. It is four months now since that poor little chap was killed, and don't you think that if he'd been shot by a passing tramp as you may say, why, that it would have come out long before now?"

"That's true enough," said the elder man more mildly, "but who says it hasn't come out? I says now as I said at the inquest, that it was Jake Ilford. Everyone for miles round knew that there was bad feeling between Mr. Seagrave and him. Everyone knew that it was through Mr. Seagrave he was clapped in gaol, and that he swore to do him a nasty turn when he could."

"So he did, so he did," said the first speaker, as though grudging him the concession, while my cigarette went out unheeded in my puzzled surprise. "But if you mean to explain that by saying that Jake Ilford comes out of prison, and creeps along to Highlands that March night, and takes and shoots down Master Robin from behind a hedge like as he would a rabbit, and then goes on his way all unconcerned like—why then I say again it don't stand to no manner of reason."

"It stands more to reason than to say a bit of a child like that shot hisself," said his companion, testily, "and hasn't Ilford been missing ever since?"

Here a friend hailed them from the other side of the road, and they went away from the hotel, and out of earshot.

Left to myself, I turned back into the station, and paced the platform in the direst perplexity. Little Robin Cheshunt was killed, shot, as my unconscious informer had said, like a rabbit, and the name of his murderer was still an open question. So much I had gathered from the men's talk, but they had only said enough to make me intensely anxious to hear more. Who was this Jake Ilford whom gossip accredited with so strong a hatred of the owner of Highlands that

the death of the little heir was laid to his charge? How came it that Seagrave, a rich man, had not been able to work the law sufficiently to capture him? And why on earth—my curiosity giving way to a feeling of resentment—why on earth had he asked me down to a grief-stricken house without giving me any inkling of how gloomy would be my visit? At this moment a porter came up and touched his cap.

"Beg pardon, sir, but if you're the gentleman for Highlands, Mr. Seagrave says would you kindly step this way. He can't leave the horses."

Through the open door I saw a pale-faced man, dressed in deep mourning, who was sitting on the box-seat of a phaeton; but it was not until my new guide shouldered my traps and started off in its direction that I realised the sad-looking man at whom I had been gazing was no other than my old friend. Good heavens, how he had changed! He looked a good ten years older than his thirty-six years, and from a robust man of medium height, he seemed literally to have shrunk in stature until he gave one the idea of having just recovered from a serious illness.

"Have you got those flowers for your mistress? Are they packed safely?" I heard him say to the groom as I came up, and I declare I welcomed the words with relief. Finding he was still full of his wife and her wants seemed a tangible proof that this shadow of his former self was really and truly Seagrave.

"Hullo, Will. You're a nice sort of fellow to volunteer to meet one."

His thin face flushed with pleasure as he leaned forward and grasped my hand.

"My watch has just come back from the cleaner's, and consequently has taken to a habit of stopping. I am awfully sorry to be late," he said. "Get in. The horses won't stand."

Apparently they would not, for I had barely cleared the wheel when they broke into a spirited trot.

"You can't think how glad I am to see you, Blair," he went on. "We never go up to town now, and I haven't seen a friend here for months past."

"No? You have been in trouble. I have been hearing something about it."

He jumped at my words as though I had given him an electric shock.

"You have heard about it—where? Did they speak of it at the station?"

In turning to answer him, I caught sight of the groom, who was leaning well forward from the back seat. It was the first good view I had had of him, and while I was answering my friend's questions, and telling him of the men's talk at the hotel door, I was all the time cudgelling my brains to remember where on earth I had seen his

servant before. My unusually good memory for faces is a pet vanity of mine, and it annoyed me that, though I could have sworn to the hatchet nose and deep-set eyes of the man behind us, I could neither recall his name nor where it was that I had seen him. Finally, I gave it up, and turned my undivided attention to his master.

"Of course it is an intensely painful subject for both of us," Seagrave was saying; "but I must tell you about it now, because I am particularly anxious you should not speak of it before the wife."

I muttered something, and nodded comprehendingly. He need not have alarmed himself, I thought; it was hardly a subject one would care to discuss with any mother.

"It was in March last," he went on, still keeping his eyes steadily upon his horses' ears; "our dear little lad had run out into the garden in the twilight. He was shot. We have never been able to find the man who fired at him."

Hearing the story like this, wrung reluctantly, as it were, from his lips, the curt recital sounded infinitely more impressive than when eked out by the gestures and comments of the tradespeople, and I felt a sudden rush of very real sympathy.

"You poor old fellow! I am most heartily sorry to hear of this. Who found the poor child?"

"I did." He shivered as he spoke.

At this moment I again caught a glimpse of the quiet face of the listening groom. The straight-cut lips were curling in a faint smile, and the contrast to the pale, suffering face at my side made me feel positively uncomfortable. Dear old Will tried to turn the conversation into a more cheerful vein by pointing out the various beauties of the drive, but I only answered him in monosyllables. That evil smile haunted me, and for the present, at least, had put ordinary talk out of the question.

As we entered the house, I told Seagrave that it annoyed me not to be able to recollect the name of his groom, as I was certain I had seen him before.

"Perhaps you have," he said carelessly. "We have only had him a week. He is a Londoner whom my wife was interested in somehow—the brother of a former servant of hers, I fancy. Tom Rutton is his name."

He turned out of the square hall through one of the many doors which opened upon it, and in another moment I was shaking hands with my hostess.

"Olive, this is Dr. Royden. You have often heard me speak of Blair Royden, my little fag at Rugby," said Seagrave in oddly persuasive tones, which somehow gave me the impression he had been dubious about my welcome, and then he began hastily unpacking the hamper of flowers we had brought with us from the little town.

While he fussed about the what-nots for specimen vases in which

to arrange them, and chatted briskly about his lack of manners in arriving too late for my train, I occupied myself in studying his wife. She was a tall, slight woman, with a quantity of dull fair hair, and a languid, graceful manner of moving. It struck me that under any other circumstances I should mentally have summed her up as singularly beautiful, but there was something about the waxen skin and general inertness which commanded a feeling of awe rather than of admiration. In her heavy pall-like draperies she looked as if all the vitality and spring of youth had gone from her—as if in all but mere actual breath the woman were dead already.

When, with the help of the flowers, we were getting through a rather laboured chit-chat, I caught the sound of unsteady little feet in the hall beyond, and through the open doorway I caught sight of a couple of white-froked children. Welcoming them as a happy break in a very stiff quarter of an hour, I called out to them, and the elder of the two crept nearer the threshold.

"Is my papa there?" she demanded.

"Yes, and mamma too. Come and make friends."

The bright little face clouded instantly, and in an almost inaudible whisper she was endeavouring to make me understand that she must not come in unless "papa" were alone, when her mother's voice cut her short.

"Go away at once, and take Willie with you. You have no business here," she said, speaking to her little daughter in exactly the same dull, monotonous voice in which she had been speaking to me; and it was pitiful to see the scared expression with which the children trotted away. And this was the wife of whom Will Seagrave had written so proudly!

I felt rather at a loss for words when presently he took me up to my room, and shut the door upon us with an interrogatory "Well?"

His eager, questioning gaze reminded me of the school-days when I, his junior by some years, was first promoted to the post of general adviser and father confessor. I remember that then I used to explain this preference to myself in a way which was by no means unflattering to my self-esteem; but since then I have modified my opinion, and think that as a boy he consulted me for the very same reasons which had now induced him to invite me to Highlands. He felt a characteristic necessity to confide in someone, and I possessed the valuable quality of being able to hold my tongue.

I pretended to misunderstand that "Well?" and flinging up my window to look at the view, I asked: "Well, what?"

"What do you think of my wife? How does she strike you? Do you think she is in bad health?" All his easy brightness had disappeared, and he fronted me with the same harassed expression I had observed at the station. "You are a doctor, Blair. You must know," he added.

"My dear Will," I remonstrated, "I have only just seen Mrs.

Seagrave. I can't tell you more than anyone else could tell you. She is evidently suffering from mental depression, and will probably grow stronger and happier as time goes on, and she gets over the shock of her boy's death."

"That she never will," said Seagrave emphatically, and then he abruptly changed the subject. "If you find the house even duller than you expected, promise me that you won't leave us at all events under the week."

Now as that was exactly what I was intending to do, I suppose I must have looked somewhat taken aback, for Seagrave at once continued to press the matter so earnestly that in the end I yielded. I felt I should be horribly in the way, but, after all, of that he must be the best judge.

It was as well he had bound me by a promise, or, undoubtedly, on the third day at latest I should have started back to town. The whole atmosphere of the place worried and depressed me, and I felt that my temper was rapidly growing as uncertain as Mrs. Seagrave's own. Certainly it was anything but a cheerful visit.

Whenever he was with his wife, Seagrave was, to all appearance, enabled to throw off his own troubles, and, with a devotion I have never seen equalled, set himself to the task of wooing her, if not to brighter spirits, at all events to a more resigned state of mind. But when he was alone with me he gave himself up unreservedly to his grief.

I do not think the loss of his little step-son had much to do with it. He was infinitely sorry, of course, but not even his love for his own children counted one feather-weight as compared with his love for his wife. The latter he simply worshipped, and as the days went slowly by, my position in the household was not rendered more comfortable by my growing conviction that she was not worth it. Were all her troubles, her irritability, and periods of intense nervous excitement—were they solely due to little Robin? Seagrave of course said yes, and would spend hours in narrating how blithe and full of life she used to be, how fond of gaieties of all sorts, and yet how devoted a wife and mother. Still I had my own doubts, although naturally I kept them to myself.

It was thinking of Rutton, the groom, which first put the suspicion into my head. The Seagraves' indoor man had fallen ill, and instead of engaging a new servant, Mrs. Seagrave had insisted upon Rutton filling his place. Consequently, I saw a good deal of him, and it soon became a source of wonderment to me how it was possible for Seagrave to have the man about the house as much as he did, without noticing the very evident understanding which existed between him and his mistress. This was through no fault of Rutton's, who, though an abominably bad servant, as far as a knowledge of his duties went, was always quietly respectful and apparently unconcerned. But Mrs. Seagrave had by no means so perfect a command of her-

self. At meals, for instance, she would follow him about with her eyes, until her husband's blindness became a thing to marvel at; and once when, deceived by a resemblance of doors, I hastily entered her boudoir, it was to find them talking earnestly together. I caught something about "your husband might notice it," before her exclamation, "I thought the door was locked!" brought my stammered apologies, but the incident certainly served to strengthen my theories.

At the end of a week I was ready to laugh myself to scorn for having jumped to such romantic conclusions, for it was then that it suddenly flashed across me where it was that I had seen the fellow before. This time it was not only possible but imperative to speak to Seagrave about him, and, at the risk of adding to his perplexities, I attacked the subject that very night. It was late, the house was quiet, and we two were in the smoking-room.

"What are you after now?" Seagrave asked curiously, as I stole softly to the one door and glanced right and left in the passage before reclosing and locking it. "You don't imagine any of the servants are staying out of their beds to listen to our instructive conversation, do you?"

"I like to make sure," I said equably. "I have something to tell you;" and then I followed his example and proceeded to light up, glancing at him as I did so.

He was looking better to-night, I fancied. For the first time since I had been with them, his wife had somewhat shaken off her lethargy, and had actually taken her share in a newspaper discussion we had had during dinner. As a natural result, Seagrave was looking more like himself again than I had yet seen him, and as he leaned indolently back in his old arm-chair, and puffed away silently at his meerschaum, he looked both quiet and contented.

"What is the important piece of news?" he said, lazily.

"This. I have set my mind at rest at last. You remember how it bothered me not to be able to recall where I had seen Rutton?"

Seagrave nodded.

"Well, now I know. Soon after I reached London this last time, I went to call on a man named Drayton—I don't think you know him. As I was waiting in the drawing-room, my friend passed through the conservatory which joins it, talking to this identical man. He told me afterwards that the fellow had been instrumental in recovering some jewellery for him, and I suppose he had called that particular morning to receive a *douceur* of some sort for his pains."

Seagrave stared at me blankly. "*Rutton* had?" he said, slowly. "My groom?"

"Yes, but don't you see, Will, he is only shamming as a servant in Mrs.—I mean in someone's pay! I would swear to his face. Rutton is a detective."

"*A detective?*" He started violently forward, gripping the arms

of the chair as he did so. His pipe had fallen to the floor, and lay in atoms at his feet; his face had blanched. We sat staring at each other for a full minute, while a horrible, sickening dread was slowly forcing itself upon me: and then the nervous grip relaxed, and he fell back in his chair, covering his face with his hands. "Good heavens!" he groaned, "it has come at last! She suspects me."

"That you, *you* killed her child?"

He must have read the question in my eyes, for but for his laboured breathing the silence remained unbroken.

"Yes, it was I who killed him."

He answered me in the hoarse, unnatural whisper we sometimes hear from the lips of the insane, and then he broke into such terrible weeping as I pray I may never hear again.

Phew! I rose from my seat, and walked to the other end of the long room. I felt an unconquerable impulse to place as much distance as possible between myself and this old friend of mine, who seemed to have grown suddenly so unfamiliar. Why, oh why had he done this thing?

It was for only an instant that this feeling mastered me, for as soon as I could collect my scattered thoughts, it was to blame myself for the momentary disloyalty. It must have been an accident, of course, and the only question that remained was, why he had not at once avowed it. I came back again to my place, and laid my hand upon Seagrave's shoulder.

"Come, rouse up, old fellow," I said, speaking as cheerily as I knew how, although, even to my own ears, the attempt sounded rather a failure. "You must tell me all about it. You ought to have told me before."

He looked up at last, but there was a dazed expression on his face as though he had not fully heard what I had said.

"Do you think Olive knows, or do you think she only suspects?"

"Neither," I said, stoutly. "She merely feels that sufficient search is not being made for—for the one who did it, and so she is trying on her own account. It is just the stupid sort of thing a woman does do."

"Then why didn't she tell me?"

I was posed for a moment, and then I said hurriedly, "Oh, well, you see, the poor little chap wasn't your own son. Mrs. Seagrave might very well feel that, with the best intentions in the world, your love could not equal hers. She might imagine you would consider it useless to continue the search after four months."

There was a long pause before he spoke again; evidently he was bracing himself to the confession of that sad day's work. He began at last, in a hesitating, self-communing sort of way, but after a little his voice grew clearer and he went on more graphically. The plunge once made, it was evidently a relief, as in the old boyish days, to take me into his confidence.

"It was in March. A big dog, belonging to one of the farmers about, had annoyed us and frightened the children by continually leaping over the wall which divides us from the lane. And it was then, when I was up in town one day, that I brought a pistol back with me. It was not with any idea of the animal that I got it, but I had had threatening letters from a poacher whom I had once been the means of sending to gaol, and I thought it was as well to have one. These country lanes are lonely at night, and sometimes I am driving late."

"So you brought it back here with you?" I asked the question after the silence had grown so lengthy that I thought he had forgotten my presence. He roused himself with a start.

"Yes. I got home about five o'clock: it was just getting dusk. Olive was out, paying calls, and she had taken our little Dulcie with her in the carriage. You have seen how she treats the child now, but in those days she idolised her only less than she did Robin. I asked for him, and I was told he was at nursery tea, so I went into the drawing-room to wait for Olive's return, and seated myself by the open window, on the look-out for the carriage. I was feeling fagged and ill-tempered. The business on which I had been up to town had gone all wrong: I was anxious about Olive, who had a cough, and ought to have been home before dusk; and I was rendered more irritable every moment by the ear-splitting noises which came from the adjoining field. The pupils at the vicarage had erected a sort of amateur shooting gallery there, and were supposed to be practising."

"Go on, dear old man, go on. And then?"

"Then, as I sat by the open window examining my new purchase, the dog—a surly brute that ought to have been chained—came bounding over our wall. It all happened in a flash. Maddened at the cool disregard of the master who let it wander about loose at its own sweet will, and with a half-thought of how terrible the consequences might be if the huge beast came down like that upon our little ones, I raised my hand and I fired. And then——. Oh, Blair—he caught my hand with a convulsive shudder—"think of the horror of it all! At the same instant that I pulled the trigger, a little white-clad golden-haired child came running between me and the beast at which I was pointing. The sharp angle of the bow-window had hidden him from me, and—and—he died without a struggle or a cry. I tore madly over the grass, and reached our darling. A smile was still resting on the dear face, and as I lifted him in my arms the little dimpled hands fell loosely forward on to my neck as they had clasped me hundreds of times before. I had thought for nothing but his mother, and how to get him safely in the house before she should come back and find him. The dining-room—you have not seen it; we never go into it now—was the nearest to me, and I carried the tiny, motionless figure in through the French window and laid it upon the long table. As I did so, I caught the

sound of wheels upon the drive, and I rushed out through the hall to the front door to meet my wife and in some sort prepare her for the shock. The carriage held only Dulcie and her nurse. Her mistress, so the woman told me, had got out half-way up the drive to look at some newly-planted ferns, and had entered the house through the dining-room window."

"And found the boy?"

My breathless question was simply answered by a grave "Yes." He had so often lived over again the whole terrible scene that the narration of it had no longer any power to stir him. It was too painful, too horrible, to find vent in mere wordy excitement. Presently he went on speaking:

"When I got back into the room I found her like a mad thing. Holding the child to her and covering him with kisses; then laying him down, chafing the little stiffening hands, or searching wildly for mark or sign of the wound; then again calling on him to speak to her. 'Look at poor mother, Robin. Darling, speak to mother.' She turned and clutched me as I ran up to her. 'He has been shot, Will, he has been shot,' she said, and then she grew suddenly quiet. She nestled up to me, recoiling from the lad as if in horror, although her eyes were fascinated upon the small round hole above his breast. '*He is dead*,' she shrieked at last, and then breaking from me she threw herself again upon the child, praying God that she might be helped to avenge him, that He would grant her strength to track down the murderer, and take his life as he had taken her boy's. Blair, it was fearful."

He stopped abruptly. Great drops of moisture were upon his forehead, and even his lips were white. To such a man, and loving his wife as passionately as he did, the scene must, as he said, have been fearful.

"You could not tell her then, of course, Will," I said pitifully; "but afterwards? Surely you could have told her afterwards?"

"I dared not," he said thickly; "I was afraid. Olive would have hated me, and I dared not risk it."

"But the pistol? Didn't they try for some weapon at the inquest which the bullet might fit? It was in your possession."

"No, it was found in the lane. I must have rushed up to Robin with the thing still smoking in my hand, and then have thrown it from me. I had picked it up second-hand in a shop in the city. No one knew I had ever thought of buying such a thing: there was no possibility of tracing it."

"But I—But surely someone must have noticed the report?"

"How could they with that perpetual firing in the next field?"

I sat silently thinking, until at length I recalled the gossip of the townspeople. "Who is Jake Ilford? How came his name to be mixed up in it?"

"He is the poacher I told you of, who, I believe, was the man

who wrote me those threatening letters. They came anonymously, of course, but Ilford had a grudge against me for what he chose to consider hard dealing. He was seen hanging about our grounds a day or two before, and at the inquest a witness who had seen him started the rumour that he was probably the guilty man. They tried to find him, but he had gone away from here before they were on his track. He had some relatives in America, and it is thought he went to them. Blair! what shall I do?"

The sudden question was fraught with all the anguish which hitherto he had successfully kept under control, and the poor fellow held out his hands to me as if his salvation depended upon my answer. I grasped them firmly.

"Get rid of this Rutton first of all," I said earnestly. "He can't find out anything—there is nothing to find out, but the knowledge he is in the house will so alter you that you will betray your own secret. And then go abroad with Mrs. Seagrave, and live in some big town. The bustle and novelty of the place will serve to distract her even if you keep quite to yourselves. Nothing but time can help either of you, but matters will never grow better if you live here with your mind continually dwelling upon the same subject. Six months will make a wonderful difference. You will find her sufficiently like her old self for life to be at all events peaceful again."

He snatched gratefully at the first ray of hope which had come to him for months.

"Do you really think so, Blair?" he cried.

Barely had the words left his lips when I caught the sound of a light foot-fall in the passage, and I had hardly time to move away from him and plunge into some irrelevant question before the door opened softly, and Mrs. Seagrave came in.

I felt as if my heart had stopped beating as I glanced at her, but no, she had evidently not heard anything. She was restless and ill at ease; I could see that by the way the thin hands were pulling at the lace upon the soft white wrapper, but that she had not been spying upon us was proved by her first words.

"Do come to bed, Will," she said querulously. "It is nearly two o'clock, and I am tired of waiting."

Seagrave rose at once. "Why, my darling, you should not have done that. Haven't you been to sleep?"

"What do you mean? Have I not as much right to sit up as you have?" she demanded sharply.

I heard afterwards that she had employed the time by going over the whole miserable story again with Rutton, and her nerves were consequently strung to the highest possible pitch.

"It is quite my fault, Mrs. Seagrave," I said remorsefully. "I have been keeping Will up to listen to my stupid traveller's tales. I will say good-night now, if you will allow me. Good-night, Will, old man."

"Oh, don't go, Dr. Royden," she said at once. "I feel so wide awake now that I would rather sit and talk to you both. See! shall I fill you a fresh pipe? Will used to say I was a very good hand at filling a pipe. I almost think I could smoke one to-night," and she went into peals of laughter.

I did not like it at all. Her eyes, which were usually so lustreless, were now glittering brightly, and though her laugh was noisy, it was utterly mirthless.

"Please sit down again," she repeated, more imperatively, and I obeyed. "You shall tell me some traveller's tales too. Or no, I know nothing of foreign life; let us talk about London."

I telegraphed my amazement to Seagrave, but he was leaning his head upon his hand and I could not see his face. Neither did he take any part in the conversation that followed, never rousing from his moody silence while his wife chatted gaily about the theatres, the rival Hungarian bands, and the charm of little Hoffmann's playing. Had it not all seemed so unnatural I should have been well entertained, but as it was —

I hurried through my smoke, and again tried to make my escape. "It is really so late, Mrs. Seagrave."

"Is it? I suppose it is," she answered vacantly, and to my dismay the brilliant, incisive speech had again been changed to the dull, monotonous tones I had learned to dread. "Do you know if the maids have gone to bed? I suppose Rutton is still up?"

"Rutton? Ah, I want to talk to you about that man, Olive."

It was done before I could stop him. Evidently he had been working himself up to follow out my suggestion, and had caught at the name as an opportune chance. Unhinged as he was by what he had just told me, nerveless as the recital had left him, it was the very worst moment he could have chosen to make the trial of his strength. Possibly he felt it easier to speak at a time when my presence would necessarily cut the matter short, but I knew it was fatal when I looked back from his face to hers. Into Mrs. Seagrave's had crept—how shall I describe it?—a sort of horrible expectancy which carved deep lines about her mouth, and gleamed sullenly in her eyes. She seemed to be lying in wait for her husband.

"Yes? What about him?" she asked, in a low, strained voice.

"I think we had better get rid of him, dear." Seagrave never raised his eyes from the carpet at his feet. "I heard to-day that James" (the man-servant whom Rutton had temporarily replaced) "is fit for work again. We should not be acting fairly by him: we did not offer him his own post."

"Why do you want him to go? Why? why?" the rapid question cut into his carefully-weighed words as though their import had not reached her ears. In the breathless silence that followed, she rose from her chair, and with an unsteady, wavering run crossed to her husband's side. "Why? Why?" she repeated wildly, laying her

burning hands upon his bowed head. "Look up, Will, look at me. Do you know who Rutton is?"

"Will! Rouse yourself!" I cried sharply. "You have just been telling Mrs. Seagrave why you wish the servant to go." But neither of them heeded me.

"You *shall* look at me," she muttered, and in another moment she had forced his head upward, and their eyes had met.

It would have been a long and harrowing scene upon the stage: in real life it was mercifully short. After that one searching look into those eyes which so furtively scanned hers, and in which despair was only too plainly written, Mrs. Seagrave stepped back for half a pace and put her hands convulsively to her throat.

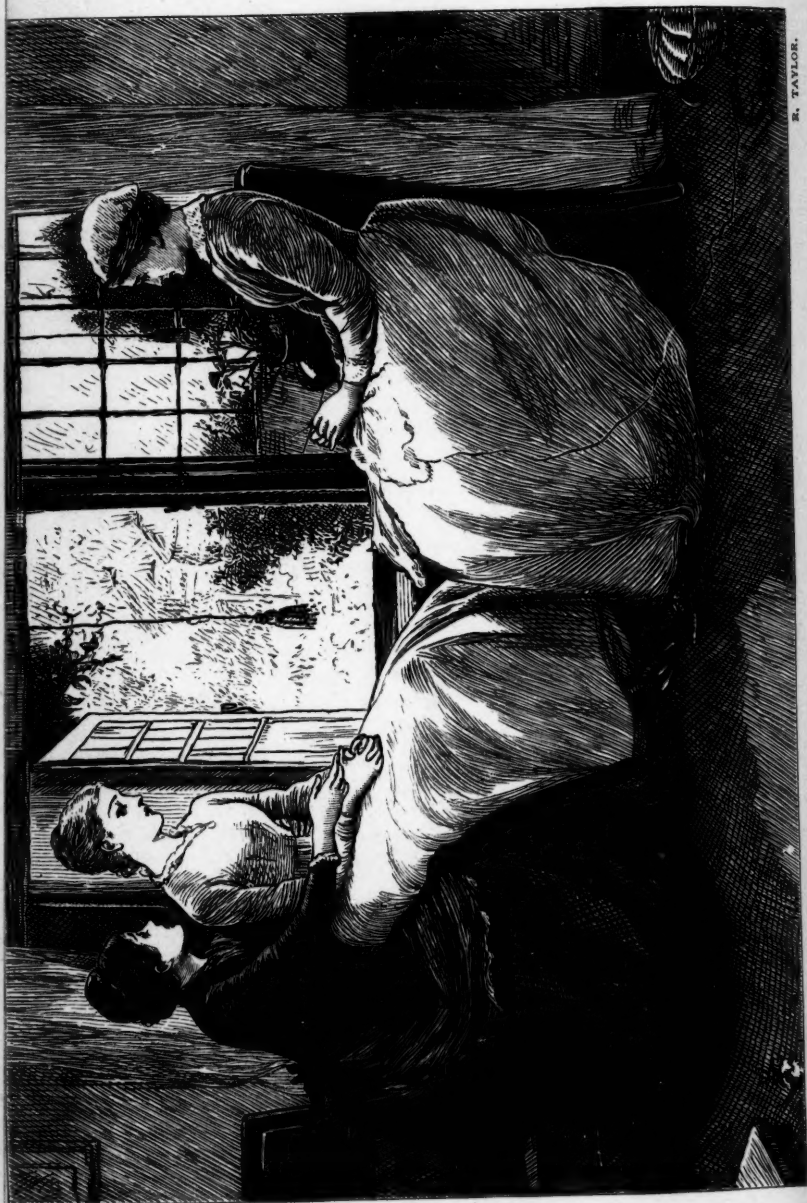
"You—you killed—him!" she gasped, swaying for a moment helplessly to and fro. "My—my ——" Before I could catch her she had fallen, and lay like a dead thing at our feet.

In the course of the following day I started the detective back to town. When I told him that if I pulled his unfortunate employer through the illness of which last night's fit had been the precursor it would only be to install her in some asylum, and when he saw the formidable array of physicians and nurses who were wired for from town, I think he felt he had made rather a mess of this, his first, murder case. I told him that, fearing her mind was giving way, Mr. Seagrave had sent for me to live in the house, and so keep better watch over my patient. Of course I had immediately recognised the supposed groom, for I had seen him at Mr. Drayton's—how amazed the fellow looked—but I had kept my own counsel, as any thwarting of the poor lady's plans might have hastened the disease.

So I talked, and so in the face of present events he was forced to believe. He went away reviling himself for having given credence to the vagaries of a failing brain; and I for once breathed the easier for his absence.

Matters rest very much as he left them. After a weary two months' confinement, which she passed in the belief that little Robin was alive and hidden away from her, Mrs. Seagrave died in the asylum where we had placed her. Will is still travelling in the East: the children have been placed with friends. I please myself sometimes by imagining that, when time shall have blunted his double sorrow, and Dulcie and her little brother have grown to a more companionable age, the three may live together again. But if the children can persuade him to give up his wandering life, they will have to content themselves with some foreign city. He will never come home.

MABEL E. WOTTON.



M. ELLEN STAPLES.

E. TAYLOR.
"OH, EMMA," IMFLORED ANNIE, IN DEEP AGITATION, "TELL THE TRUTH. YOU KNOW IT CANNOT BE HIDDEN ALWAYS."